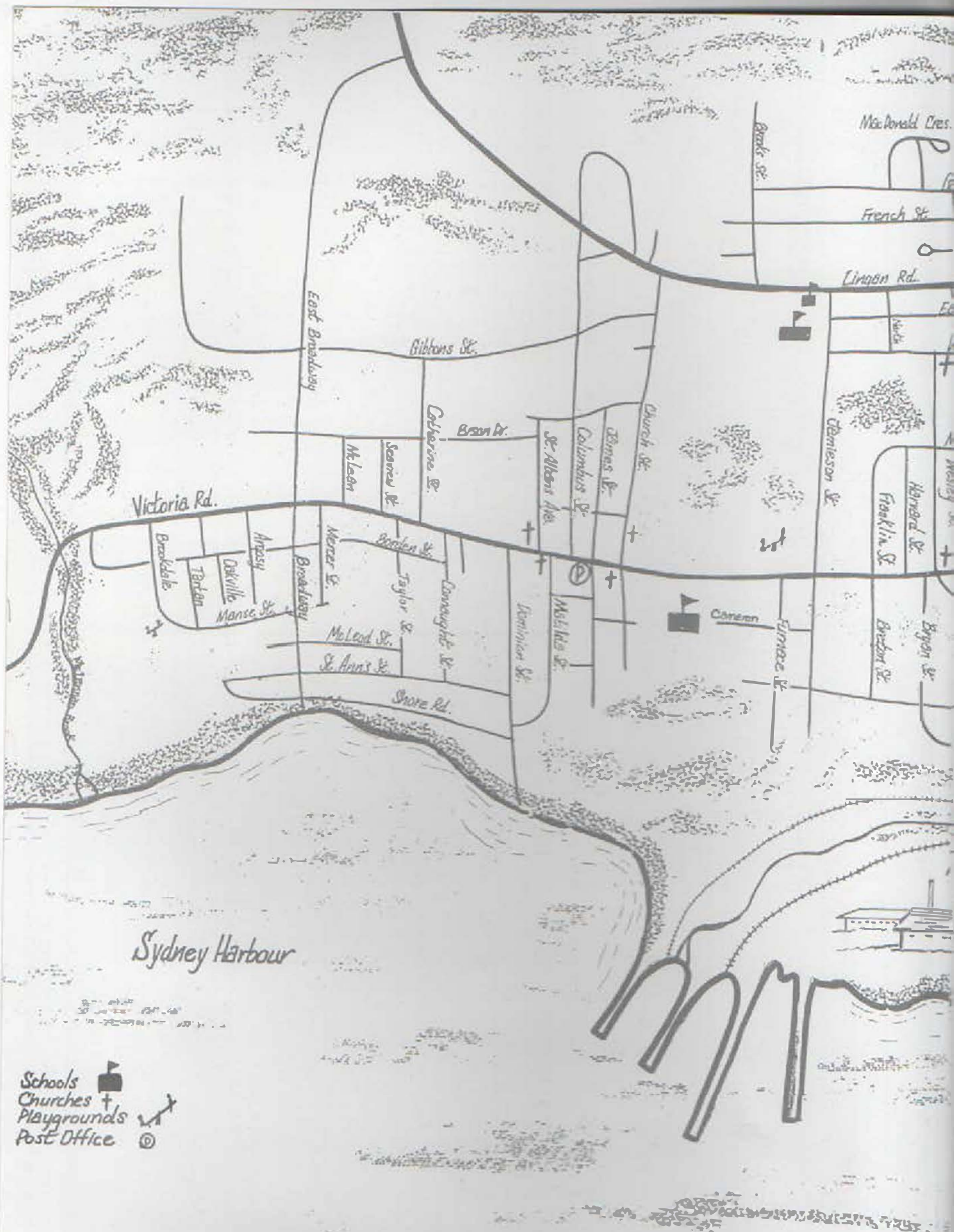




*From the Pier,
Dear!*

*Images of a
Multicultural Community*

Published by the Whitney Pier Historical Society



Sydney Harbour

Schools 
Churches 
Playgrounds 
Post Office 





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Dear!*

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Acknowledgements:

The Whitney Pier Historical Society wishes to extend thanks to Mary Keating and Elizabeth Beaton for their research and writing; to Evelyn Moraff Davis, Beryl Braithwaite, Duncan Mackay, and Ron DiPenta for contributing their research; to the many who answered questions and volunteered information, making this work possible; to the many authors and researchers whose primary and secondary works contributed to this interpretation; to the Beaton Institute for extensive use of its resources; to all those who contributed photographs and art work; to Mary Anne Ducharme for her advice, editing and layout; to John Tynski for the cover sketch; to Ron Evelyn for the flyleaf map and various sketches throughout the book; to LeBlanc Printers and City Printers for advice and encouragement; to the Advisory Committee for reading the various drafts of the manuscript. Most of all, the Whitney Pier Historical Society wishes to thank the people of Whitney Pier at home and far away who made the Pier a good place to belong.

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Welcome to Whitney Pier

We dedicate this book in memory of our deceased members, to the community of Whitney Pier, and all those who have contributed in any way to the continuing operation of the museum.

Within these pages lies a portion of the story of Whitney Pier. Major changes have occurred in this community since the last printing, the principal one being the demise of Sydney Steel. The role of the Whitney Pier Historical Society and the Museum has become more important than ever in the community as we strive to preserve the history and multi-cultural aspect of this special place. The Museum has evolved to become a widely recognized, first class member of the community museum system. We invite you to share our present as well as our past through this publication, the Internet, and a personal visit to the museum. We are indebted to Sydney businessmen Martin Chernin, Dave Gillis, Wayne Weatherbee, Gary Wilson, Blair Oake, City Printers, and Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation for their invaluable contribution to this publication. Without their generosity and community spirit this project would not have happened.



Enterprise Société
Cape Breton d'expansion
Corporation du Cap-Breton

Enjoy your visit to the Pier, dear!

The Members of the Whitney Pier Historical Society

Preface

For as long as anybody can remember, "I'm from the Pier, dear!" has indicated a pride of place for the people of Whitney Pier. Whitney Pier, since its beginning at the end of the 19th century, has made a significant contribution to the development of Sydney as an industrial city. In spite of economic downturns, and in spite of pollution from the massive steel plant just beside it, Whitney Pier not only survived, it has flourished. Whitney Pier's people are proud to be working people, strong and vibrant in their various ethnic traditions. They have shaped their community to reflect the values of those traditions.

From the Pier, Dear: Images of a Multicultural Community presents our community. It is a "reference" to the history and culture of Whitney Pier. The map on the inside cover, the photographs and the sketches show important points on the community landscape. Short essays interpret some of the historical and contemporary experiences of its people. Except in unusual instances, we have not referred to specific people by name, partly to protect privacy, but also because their stories and experiences were applicable to many.

The book will serve as a guide to anyone who wishes to follow the paths of the community's work, spiritual life and leisure. The reader is encouraged to experience Whitney Pier firsthand. Wander through its neighbourhoods, look into its halls and pause at its religious places, watch at its ball fields, linger in its blueberry patches, explore its stores – and above all, meet its people. This publication, which is directed at schools as well as a general readership, is intended to be part of an on-going process of discovery. It is an invitation to learn about and walk about a special community's heritage.

Despite our efforts to be as comprehensive as possible, it is but a sampling of the riches found in this community. Anyone who has experienced Whitney Pier will realize that this publication barely scratches the surface. A bibliography is included at the end of the book to permit the reader to explore more deeply into Whitney Pier's history. *The Pier Museum* also offers an excellent opportunity to share its historical and contemporary life.

The information in this book is the result of both primary and secondary research. Much of the work was done on a voluntary basis. The Research and Writing Committee worked with an Editorial Advisory Committee from the various cultural groups of Whitney Pier. A special credit goes to the editing and design by Mary Anne Ducharme, whose dedication and enthusiasm for this project was a welcome reminder to weary volunteers that their work was worthwhile. Final approval for the content and form of the book came from the membership of the Whitney Pier Historical Society.

Elizabeth Beaton, Ph.D., University College of Cape Breton



(Photo by Warren Gordon, courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society)

*From the Pier,
Dear!*

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Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Photo donated by Pierce Kehoe

The Subway . . .

In 1912 Dominion Iron and Steel built a subway to carry traffic under its train tracks at MacQuarries Crossing, where there were an estimated 1500 individual crossings per day of pedestrians, carts, and limited traffic by automobiles between Sydney and Whitney Pier. Furthermore, Cape Breton Electric tramcars were not permitted to cross over the steel company rails, creating an awkward situation where passengers had to come off one tram car, cross the tracks on foot and again board a tram car on the other side.

As effective as it was in eliminating disruption for steel company's rail cars, the Subway became almost affectionately notorious for its problems. There was no adequate sidewalk for pedestrians and when it rained, the Subway filled with water, often over the wheels of the vehicles. Traffic was forced to travel on a makeshift road that went from Lingan Road through the steel plant. Often, the Subway was more effective than MacQuarries Crossing had been in separating Whitney Pier from the rest of Sydney.



Photos courtesy of the Beaton Institute





Martin Chernin

Martin Chernin, son of Etta (Gaum) and the late Mendel Chernin, is a Sydney businessman who studied commerce at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish and Dalhousie University, Halifax. He is married to Whitney Pier native Gale Rudderham, B Comm, LL.B and they reside in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Gail is the principal partner in the law firm RudderhamChernin Barristers and Solicitors, Sydney and 2nd Vice-President of the Nova Scotia Barristers Society.

Currently Martin is President of: Bentick Investments; Harbour Royal Development Ltd.; Joe's Warehouse Ltd.; Laurentian Energy Corporation; Pearl Realty Ltd., and Jackman Development Ltd. all of Sydney. He is a shareholder in North Star Inn Ltd., North Sydney, Nova Scotia and Past-President of Cape Breton Cablevision Ltd. and Trinidad & Tobago Transcable Ltd.

Martin has always given freely of his time to the community and it is clearly reflected in the many organizations that benefit from his expertise. At present he is Chair, Leader, United Way of Cape Breton; President Temple Sons of Israel; Advisory board of Technology, Enterprise Center, University College of Cape Breton; Canadian Olympic Society; Vice-Chair and Board Member, Sydney Airport Authority; Board Member United Israel Appeal of Canada Inc.

An avid golfer, Martin is frequently seen during the summer months on the golf courses at Ingonish and Lingan.

The Whitney Pier Historical Society thanks Mr. Chernin for his interest and support.



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

...and The Overpass



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

Almost 50 years later, in 1963, Sydney decided to deal with the problems by building an Overpass. The Overpass was constructed by Chappells Ltd. at a cost of 1.3 million dollars. There are a number of theories about the two types of structures making up the Overpass, and the "dip" from one structure to the other. The City Engineer at the time explains that, in order to obtain federal funding for construction, the overpass was in effect "two" overpasses, at the rate of \$500,000 per overpass. The "dip" reduced the original cost estimate by about 40%.

The Overpass, like the Subway and MacQuarries Crossing before it, remains a unique landmark and a prominent symbol of Whitney Pier's sense of place.



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

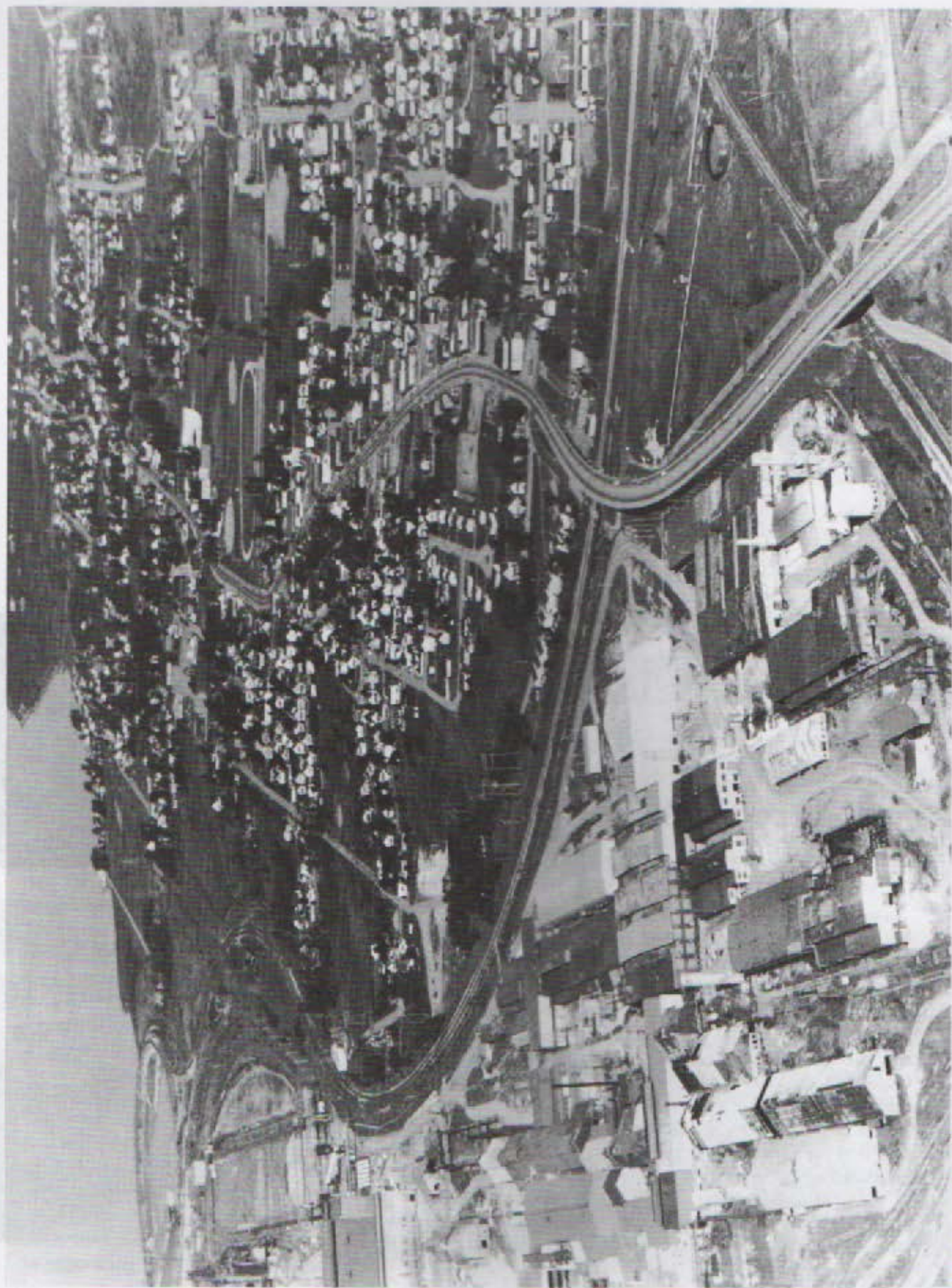


Photo by Gerry Langille



Abe Gaum



Dave Gaum



The Gaum Family

For more than 50 years, the Gaum Clinic operated in Whitney Pier. Brothers Abe and Dave Gaum were a unique pair of physicians whose compassion for their fellow man was only exceeded by their medical skills. They worked tirelessly to improve the medical system in Sydney and their patient load spanned the entire area. The Renal Dialysis Unit at the former City Hospital was a result of their devotion to medicine and was dedicated in honour of their parents, Louis and Pearl Gaum. Dr. Abe was a past president of medical staff at both the City and St. Rita's Hospitals (now replaced by the Regional Hospital) and Chief of Surgery at both, as well. Together they ran one of the largest medical offices in the province. House calls were the norm and families struggling through a rough time were helped in many ways when-

ever and wherever the Gaums saw need. Dr. Abe's death in 1985, at the age of 75, brought an end to a special era in the practice of family medicine and surgery, the like of which will not be seen again. When Dr. Dave retired, he lived in Israel for a time and now resides in Sydney.



Cyril Gaum



Pinky Gaum



Louis and Pearl Gaum

When Louis and Pearl Gaum came to Whitney Pier from Russia at the turn of the last century, they lived over, what later became, the Gaum Clinic. Mr. Gaum operated a clothing store and tailor shop on the first floor. They raised a family of eight - four boys and four girls. Besides Drs. Abe and Dave, there was Percy (Pinky) who, among his many other accomplishments, represented the area in the Nova Scotia Legislature from 1956-1967, and Dr. Cyril, who, in his younger days, practiced dentistry in Whitney Pier. He left for Boston to further his studies where he became a specialist in Endodontics for which he is world renowned. He is now Professor Emeritus at Tufts University. The girls were Bella Gaum, Libby Brenner, Bessie Davidson and Etta Chernin who reside in Sydney. Bella, throughout her lifetime, was the office manager for the family business and, subsequently, the Gaum Clinic. Libby owned and operated a successful ladies clothing business. Bessie (Bunny) and Etta were always active volunteers in the community while raising their own families.

The legacy of the Gaum family continues to be felt, not only in Sydney, Cape Breton, but, throughout North America.



*Front row: Libby, Pearl and Bessie (Bunny).
Back row: Etta and Bella*

These pages are dedicated to the Gaum Family for their contribution to the community by Sydney Businessman, Martin Chernin. Further information on the Gaum family is available at the museum.



D. Wayne Weatherbee

Wayne Weatherbee was born in Whitney Pier on October 27, 1948. He is the son of a steel worker, received his early education at Whitney school and graduated from Sydney Academy. Wayne was married to the former Lynda Wilson, who passed away in 1997 and he has three sons, Matthew, Glen and Andrew.

Wayne opened his funeral home on November 15, 1975. He had an early introduction to the funeral business with R.H. Fillmore Funeral Home, working part-time while attending high school and continued with his apprenticeship in 1972. At that time he was the youngest person to hold a licence in the Province of Nova Scotia.

With the development of Sydney Memorial Chapel Limited, Wayne established the first crematorium in Nova Scotia, outside of the Dartmouth area and a rental property business.

With the help of the people of Cape Breton, he has succeeded in establishing his core business that has allowed him to expand to other interests. His success, resulting from his personal drive, determination and commitment to the community, has resulted in the establishment of Senator's Place. In 1991 Wayne incorporated a company called Senator's Corner Development Limited and entered into an agreement with then Mayor Donald MacInnis,

of the Town of Glace Bay, to build a 54,000 square foot building which is certainly one of the focal points of the downtown area.

Giving back to the community has always been a high priority in Wayne's daily life. His community activity involvement include: Directorships: Horizon Achievement Centre; Cape Breton Crime Stoppers; Salvation Army Advisory Board; The Cove Guest Home. He is Past-President of the Kiwanis Club of Sydney and a member of the Sydney Board of Trade.

In his business life Mr. Weatherbee is the President and owner of Sydney Memorial Chapel Limited, Funeral home; Cape Breton Crematorium Limited; Lyn Way Investments Limited, Real estate; Kolara Investments Limited, Commercial property; AGM Solutions Inc., Data Technology; Senator's Corner Development Limited, Commercial property. Board of Director and membership for business groups are: Splash Distribution Limited, Shareholder; N.S. Board of Registration of Embalmers and Funeral Directors Association, Chairperson; Canadian Group of Independent Funeral Homes, N.S. Representative; N.S. Funeral Director Association; Funeral Service Association of Canada.

Congratulations Wayne, and continued success. Many thanks for your generous support.

Gary and Karen Wilson

Born on December 24, 1943, Gary Wilson is the second son of Violet and the late Earl Wilson. Gary grew up with his brother and two sisters in Whitney Pier on Furnace Street. His father Earl was a steel worker from Whitney Pier.

Karen MacMillan was born on March 10, 1943. Karen was the youngest of three children born to the late Ervina and Bruce MacMillan. Karen spent her childhood on Cottage Road, Sydney. Her father Bruce was also a steel worker.

Gary Wilson and Karen MacMillan married on August 7, 1965. They have been blessed with two sons, Jason and Troy, and four grandchildren.

In 1977 the first Tim Hortons Restaurant in Cape Breton opened its doors on Welton Street, Sydney. Owners Gary and Karen Wilson had no idea at that time this was the beginning of an adventure that would include thirteen more Tim Hortons throughout Sydney, Glace Bay, Reserve Mines, New Waterford, Whitney Pier, and Dominion areas.

The pioneer spirit that led Gary and Karen to Tim Hortons also led them further. They now own Wendy's Restaurant on Welton Street, Sydney and on King Street, North Sydney. In addition to these restaurants Gary and Karen are the owners of Dooly's Billiards; Pitt Street, Sydney, Blowers Street, North Sydney, and Main Street, Antigonish. They employ approximately 350 people. Jason Wilson, their eldest son, operates the Tim Hortons Restaurants in the Mayflower Mall, Whitney

Pier, Grand Lake Road, and the Sydney/Glace Bay Highway. Troy Wilson, their youngest son, operates the two Wendy's Restaurants; Sydney and North Sydney, and the three Dooly's Billiards; Sydney, North Sydney and Antigonish.

Wilson Investments Limited, Nettie D. Enterprises, T-Roy Enterprises, Jason Troy, 2181485 N.S. Limited, Dooly's Sydney Inc., Dooly's North Sydney Inc., and Dooly's Antigonish Inc., are all companies owned and operated by Gary and Karen Wilson. They are shareholders with Splash Distribution, Merit Network 2000 Limited and The Screaming Eagles.



Gary and Karen are strong supporters of The Tim Hortons Children's Foundation. Their hard work and dedication is an inspiration to us all and is reflected in the smiling faces of many children. Each year, Gary and Karen send 28 deserving children on a 10-day camping adventure throughout the summer at one of the foundation's camps across Canada and the United States. Gary and Karen are involved in sponsoring approximately 2700 children in timbit hockey, soccer and t-ball. They help organize timbit jamborees each year for the children. They are generous in giving back to the community

not only through timbit sports but also play an active interest in many community involvements, such as the recent smile cookie campaign in support of The Two Rivers Wildlife Park.

Congratulations and continued success to Gary and Karen Wilson.



Blair Oake

Blair Oake, the second oldest of 4 sons, was born September 17, 1948 to Raymond and Betty. He spent his very early years on Mt. Pleasant Street in the Pier at his grandparents home where Raymond grew up. He attended Whitney School for a couple of years with friend Wayne Weatherbee (who is almost as old).

Blair is married to Rose Marie Tomko and they have one son. Blair Jr is 33 and is presently working in construction in Halifax.

Like his father, grandfather and many of his uncles, Blair was also a steelworker for about eight years. His only time away from Cape Breton was for one year when he worked in New Brunswick. Upon his return to Sydney in 1981, he worked for New Dawn Enterprises and for the following six years managed New Dawn's Housing Company.

In 1988 he moved on to City printers as President and General Manager and one of the three shareholders. Blair presently manages a plant with twenty-two employees and is the publisher of the well-known local publications, The Cape Bretoner and Travel Cape Breton.

City Printers Limited, a well established 28 year old business, has always been a generous community supporter and regularly gives to a number of worthy causes including such projects as Two Rivers Wildlife Park, numerous local charities, high school scholarships, Crime Stoppers, Kids Sports Nova Scotia and Adopt a Family just to name a few.

As can be seen from the photo, Blair enjoys playing head lobster cook at the annual City Printers Staff Picnic (the only thing missing from the photo is the black rum!) He spends his free time landscaping and gardening at home with his wife. His second love is carpentry although he has not mastered that yet.



Stephen A. Gillis



Patrick W. Gillis



R. David Gillis

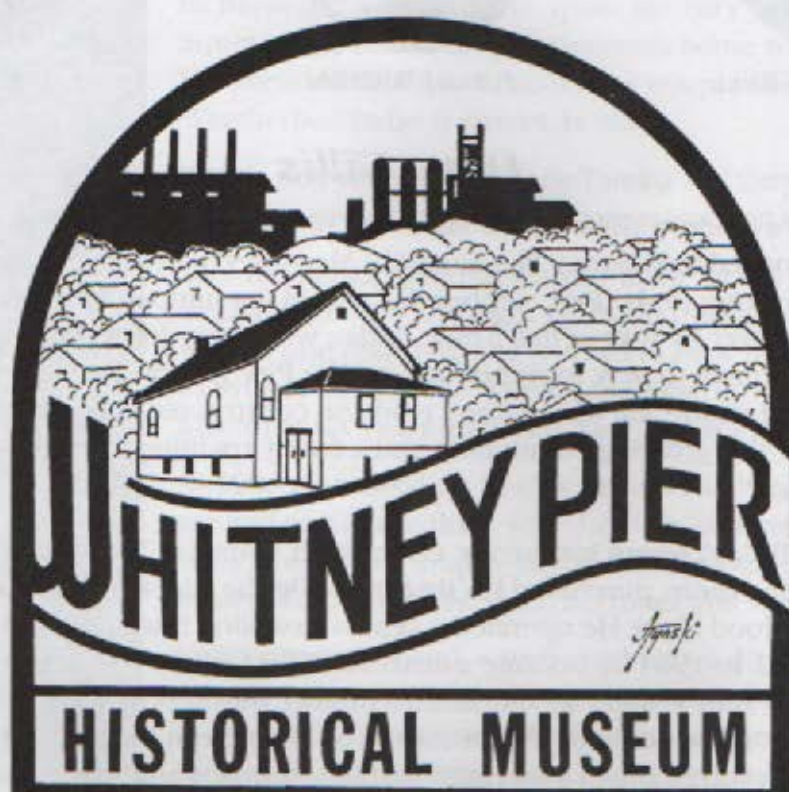
Dave Gillis

You might say that today's modern Gillis Tim-br Mart was 100 years in the making. At the turn of the century, Steven A. Gillis moved to Whitney Pier from the Meadows in Sydney Forks and built a home on 106 Church St. Prior to moving to the Pier, Stephen "A" was in the lumber business he transported logs to Chappells Mill at Sydney River by way of the 7 mile bridge water way from the Meadows. In the Pier, he built houses and moved houses to new locations around the Pier. He was a road builder at a time when roads were few and far between. One of the many roads he constructed is Gunn St. at the Pier. In 1905 he was elected Alderman for this growing community, and a family tradition of community involvement began.

In 1940 his son Patrick (Paddy) began his driving career with Canadian Livestock Co-op, now Co-op Atlantic, and while working there, purchased his first truck. By the late 40's, he was independently trucking for Co-op and Robin Hood Flour. He operated a general trucking business from his home at 121 Church St. from 1944-1992. In 1964 he became a distributor for Ogilvie Five Roses Flour and operated a warehouse on Kings Rd. "Paddy's" son David opened a lumber business in 1983 at the same site and that is where Gillis Tim-br Mart is located today. What started out being run from his kitchen table with a couple of employees, has evolved into a successful building supplies and renovation centre with annual sales in the millions of dollars, employing over 30 people. David and his wife Charlotte, who recently celebrated their 25th Anniversary, are owners of the Gillis group of companies, which include; Gillis Tim-br Mart and Gillis Renovations Centre in Sydney River, and Superior Truss Mfg Ltd on Keltic Dr. Sydney River. David is a member of the Knights of Columbus, the Board of Trade, and an active community supporter.

David's community involvement comes to him naturally. As a youngster growing up in a family of 12 in Whitney Pier, he recalls that the door was always open and a meal available to any "extra guest" who happened by. Every school day his father drove at least 20 boys on the back of the flour truck, back and forth to Sydney Academy. In the summer, Paddy would transport all the kid's luggage to Holy Redeemer camp and employed many of the youth during the summer. He volunteered his services to tend the Parish cemeteries. He even volunteered David to give free haircuts to anyone who he felt needed one, and that spirit of giving became second nature.

Thanks David for your generous support to the Whitney Pier Historical Society and Museum. We wish you much continued success. More information on the Gillis Family can be seen at the museum.



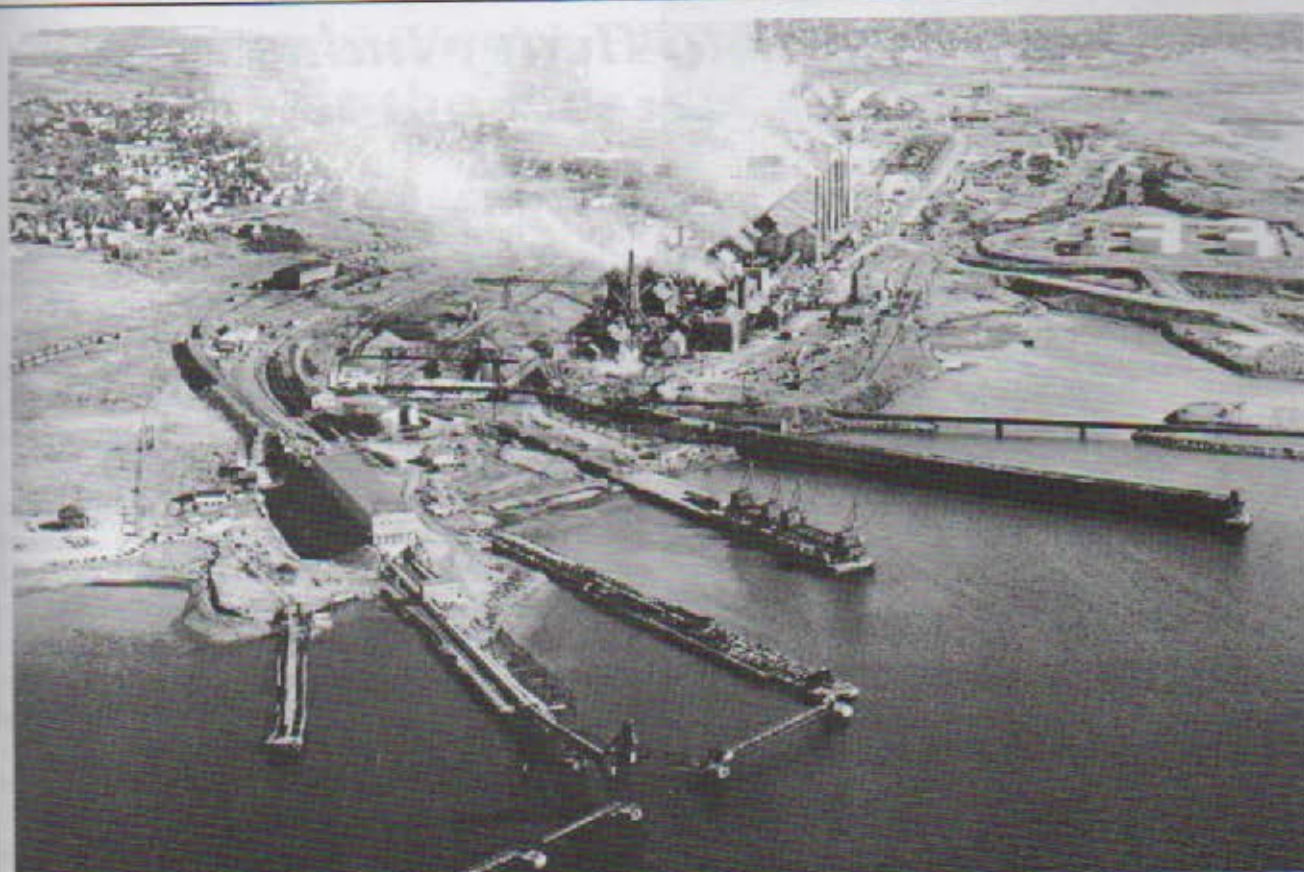


Photo by Nova Scotia Information Service

Whitney Pier is a distinct part of Sydney, Nova Scotia which slopes up from the east side of Sydney Harbour in three successive ridges. It is a triangle-shaped area located on the north east corner of the city, contained in about three square miles. Whitney Pier is well-defined geographically; it is surrounded by the ocean, the steel plant, and the blueberry barrens reaching up to the Radar Base. It is effectively separated from the "suburb" of South Bar by MacLennan's Brook. The only connection with the rest of Sydney ("over town") is a huge overpass which travels over the railway tracks between the steel plant and the now defunct Coke Ovens. It is politically defined as Ward V and Ward VI, but there is no formal declaration of the geographical boundaries of Whitney Pier. Yet, residents and outsiders alike recognize both the physical and social boundaries of this unique community.

The varied landscape of Whitney Pier is the physical evidence of the community's experience. The different types of buildings . . . homes, halls, churches, stores . . . are symbolic of the multi-ethnic character and industrial nature of the Whitney Pier way of life, and also of the layering effect of the community's history.

Whitney Pier has not been static, nor has its growth consistently followed the patterns set by the early years. Movements of ethnic groups within the Pier, ethnic intermarriage, and the outmigration to other parts of Canada have all resulted in a constantly changing community. Yet the foundations of the place and its people remain firm, and Whitney Pier is a place noted as much for its solidarity as for its diversity. Whitney Pier's sense of place is expressed with staunch pride in being "FROM THE PIER, DEAR!" ■

From Farms to Heavy Industry

The seeds of Whitney Pier took root in 19th century farmland, extending from Muggah's Creek to South Bar. But, since the late 19th century, Whitney Pier's significance was based in the steel and coal industries. From about 1870, business and social activities centred around the International Pier from which coal was shipped and supplies were imported.

In the mid- 1890's, H.M. Whitney, a Boston Industrialist who was also president of the Dominion Coal Company, constructed coal loading piers beside those already in place.

With the abundance of coal was the promise of steel production. Whitney was keen to take advantage of the opportunities offered the Cape Breton coal industry by the 1879 National Policy, and by the coming of the Intercolonial Railway to Sydney. The future of railways throughout Canada made steel and coal the industries of the 20th century.

The community flourished with the construction and operation of the steel plant at the beginning of the 20th century, and for almost the entire century, the production of steel became an integral part of Whitney Pier.

The present population of Whitney Pier is approximately 6,500, one-fifth of the total population of Sydney. It is made up of an almost even split between Anglo-Celtic and non Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Newfoundlanders (mainly of Irish and English descent) make up the majority ethnic group in the area, followed by more or less equal numbers of Ukrainians, Italians, Poles,

Blacks, and rural Cape Breton Scots, Acadians and Irish. There are smaller numbers of Jews, Croations, Hungarians and Lebanese. The population of Whitney Pier peaked in the second and third decades of this century. By that time, most of the ancestors of today's population had arrived.

Work is a primary factor in the development of Whitney Pier. The transportation of coal and the production of steel resulted in hundreds of different types of jobs and are key to orientation of the community. However, not all of the people of Whitney Pier worked in the coal or steel industries: a tradition of business and trades has developed as well as a wealth of literary and political skills. Artistic and athletic interests add to these, resulting in a nearly self-sufficient economic and social life.

Religion plays an important part in sustaining a sense of community in Whitney Pier. In the early years, religion provided a stable focus for the immigrant communities, encouraging women and children to follow and settle with their husbands and fathers who worked in the coal or steel industries. Coinciding with the establishment of new congregation were benefit or benevolent societies that addressed the spiritual, cultural, social and financial needs of the new immigrants. Representing elements of both religion and work, these societies continue to enhance the life of Whitney Pier. ■

- Elizabeth Beaton



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, John Beaton Collection

The steel plant virtually surrounds the community: the coke ovens on the south and west, the open hearth, mills, and shops to the west, and the blast furnaces and piers to the north. The smells and sounds of the plant brought the realization not only of the ups and downs of a corporate industrial economy, but also environmental concerns for every family of Whitney Pier.

Solidarity and Division: Ethnicity at the Pier

Whitney Pier is a community of distinct neighbourhoods based on the various ethnic backgrounds of its people. In the early years of settlement, outside economic and social forces, such as the availability of housing, imposed the segregation of groups into specific areas of the Pier. For example, the "Coke Ovens" became known as a Black area (occupied also by Ukrainians and Italians), and the name "Hunky Town" was associated with the many Slavs who settled at the end of Henry and Ferris Streets. This section of Whitney Pier was also known to immigrant Slavs as "Kolonja." Newfoundlanders were relegated to sub-standard "shacks" in several areas of the Pier. Yet, these early attempts to isolate certain immigrant groups resulted in ethnic solidarity, a positive feature in the formation of neighbourhoods.

Ethnicity in Whitney Pier has always been a curious mixture of negative and positive experiences. In the first decade of the 20th century, Newfoundlanders had a horrifyingly high rate of industrial injury or death, simply because they were considered dispensable. Gaelic speaking Scots also suffered discrimination at work. During World War I, Ukrainians were harassed or interned as a result of an accident of history which placed their homeland in enemy territory. The Italians of Whitney Pier, even those who were born in Canada, suffered the same fate in World War II. For many years, Canadian immigration policy discriminated harshly against Blacks and other "visible groups." In Whitney Pier, as in other parts of Canada, ethnic and racial discrimination limited opportunity in education, housing, jobs and social life.

Yet the families of Whitney Pier always have attempted to come to terms with the experiences that brought them together or set them apart. While celebrations of religious feasts symbolized the cultural vitality within each ethnic community, public occasions such as movies, plays, dances, picnics, and sports provided time in which to put aside ethnic differences.

Integration through the years was



Photo courtesy of Beaton Institute, gift of J. Markotich

accomplished through marriages, changes in the education system, and in the way jobs were allocated.

Even as the residents of Whitney Pier dealt with their own internal differences, they were keenly aware of being perceived as "different" by outsiders. Living close to the coke ovens and steel plant, being a polyglot community were often viewed negatively. However, the people of Whitney Pier responded with a mixture of pride, humour, and hospitality.

Today, the wider public is often invited to experience and enjoy ethnic difference through festivals and the performing arts. Neighbourhoods continue to be recognized for their ethnic character, but the negative connotations are replaced by an appreciation of ethnic difference. ■

Elizabeth Beaton



Photo by George Hunter

Since 1900, the steel industry has influenced the economy and social life of all Cape Breton, and especially Sydney. But Whitney Pier was the district most affected by steel. In fact, its growth as an urban industrial community was inextricably tied to steelmaking, and the ups and downs of the industry have directly affected its development throughout the century.

Steel production in Sydney was the brainchild of the Boston industrialist, H.M. Whitney, head of the Dominion Coal Company which mined coal in Cape Breton since 1893. Cape Breton was a logical place for the production of steel. It had local coal fields and limestone deposits, iron ore across the Cabot Strait at Wabana, Newfoundland, and an accessible harbour from which to export the finished product. Under the direction of H.M. Whitney, the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) began construction of the Sydney plant in 1899. The first heat was poured on December 31, 1901.

The Sydney plant was immediately famous for its "modern" American technology and was the topic of excitement all over North America. In *The Halifax Herald* in 1901, General Manager A.J. Moxham proclaimed of the steelmaking operation: "Canada's position as a steel maker is now something more than strong. It is invulnerable."

In the decades that followed, Sydney had the largest heavy industry in the Maritime Provinces, and one of the three integrated steel plants in Canada.

Throughout the twentieth century, Sydney steel makers made history in technical innovation. The "Mackie Retarded Cooling Process" of the early 30's was the best known, but there were many others, including a melt resistant blast furnace "tuyere" or special "valve" developed by machinist George Beaton. In 1956, the furnace crews poured 49,000 tons of steel without an "off-heat," a record yet to be matched anywhere.

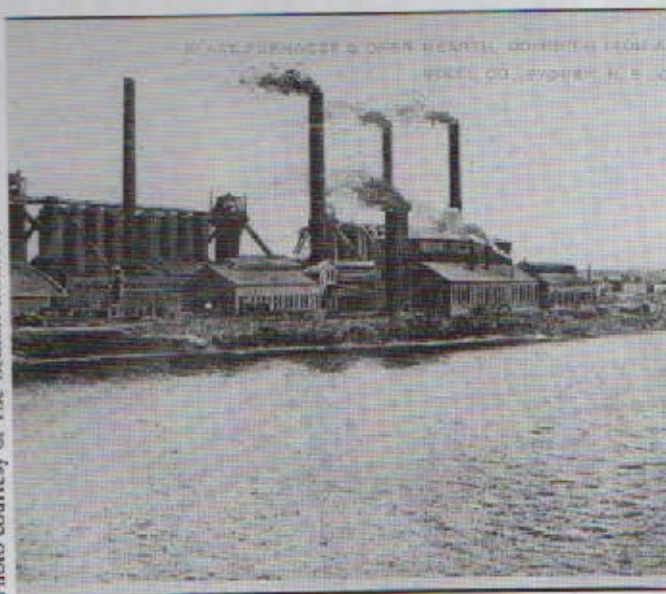
The steel plant is located immediately beside Whitney Pier on the south side of Sydney Harbour. At its peak, it consisted of over 100 buildings on 500 hectares of land. Since 1901, the major products of the plant have been iron, semi-processed ingots and billets, rails (beginning 1905), wire and nails (beginning 1901), plate (beginning 1918).

By 1905, the plant boasted of a battery of 400 Otto-Hoffman by-product coke ovens, four blast furnaces with a combined capacity of 1200 tons, 10 fifty-ton open hearths tilting furnaces, a 35 inch blooming mill, a rod mill, a rail mill, a machine shop, a foundry and power plants. Much of the shovelling, wheelbarrow and other back-breaking work associated with previous iron and



The story of the Sydney Steel Plant reflects the life patterns of the people of Whitney Pier. It is the story of proud work, unequalled camaraderie and class struggle, of machinery and skills and accidents of environmental problems, of an industrial community.

Steel



steel technology was eliminated in the "state of the art" plant. The new internal machinery of the Sydney steel plant included steam driven or electrically powered cranes, mechanical doors, conveyors and cars of various sorts on a huge complex of rail transportation. Still, there was a co-existence of manual labour and machinery-operated labour in the plant throughout its history. "Bull work," such as furnace cleaning or lifting bales of wire, continued to be done by hand and depended on the strength and stamina of the workers.

In 1909, DISCO merged with the Dominion Coal Company to become the Dominion Steel Company (DOSCO). By 1920, the Sydney plant, now British Empire Steel Corporation (BESCO) had expanded significantly. It added a blooming mill in 1903, a rail mill in 1904, a rod and bar mill in 1910, and plate mill in 1918. Auxiliary shops included a foundry, a forge, and a machine shop. A new blast furnace had been added, along with two replacements of the coke ovens. Throughout the period, the steel makers in Sydney experimented with various technologies in trying to find processes compatible with the types of iron ore and coal found in the region. They concluded that the open hearth process was best, although variations of Bessemer converters were tried. In 1929, the company was turned back to DOSCO.

The plant prospered during the two world wars. Sydney was an important producer of shell steels and coke ovens by-products during World War I. A steel plate mill went into production in

1918, but fell into disuse immediately after the war, to be revived with the Second World War, which also saw the expansion of the open hearth area. But after World War II, the ravages of the Depression showed through as the boom of the war years became a "bust," and it became evident that the out-dated DOSCO equipment could not keep up with its modern Ontario steel competitors.

Adding to the decline of markets for coking by-products after World War II was the fire in the 1940's that destroyed the Dominion Tar Company, adjacent to the Subway.

In the mid-1950's, amidst the fanfare of a new Kopper-Becker coke ovens, and rebuilt open hearth and blast furnace, the plant changed hands once again, this time to the Britain-based company, Hawker-Siddeley. But the new management was not prepared to further revitalize the steel plant's aging technology in the face of the downturn in the world steel markets and particularly in the face of a Nova Scotia government report which stated that "Sydney possessed no actual or potential economic advantages for steel production and was disadvantaged because of its distance from markets."

On "Black Friday," October 13, 1967, Hawker-Siddeley announced that it was closing the plant. The protest that followed is part of the folklore of Industrial Cape Breton. Men, women, and children, students, singers, clergy, and even politicians rallied to "Save our Steel."

The result: SYSCO came into being, a corporation of the Nova Scotia government. Unsuccessful technologies, shut-downs and lay-offs, and promises of modernization followed. Finally, in 1987, the modernization and down-sizing of SYSCO began, followed by the complete closure of the coke ovens, the last cast at the blast furnace, and the last heat of the open hearth. It was the end of integrated steel production at Sydney.

SYSCO has been a mini-mill since 1990, employing about 900 people. Its future lies in an overseas market for rails and the successful combination of electric arc/ ladle metallurgy/ computerized mill technology with an expert workforce of steel makers.

The Nova Scotia government announced its intention to privatize SYSCO in early 1992. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton



Photo courtesy of Whitney Pier Historical Society



Photo courtesy of Nova Scotia Information Service

The Steelworkers

The Sydney steel plant's greatest resource has always been its workforce. The greatest numbers of people were employed during the years of both World Wars, with the peak showing about 6,000 in the workforce. Women have worked at the plant throughout its history, mainly in clerical jobs. However, during the Second World War, about 700 women were employed at jobs in every operation of the plant. The steelworkers of Sydney are remarkable for their solidarity and pride of workmanship in an inherently dangerous industry that has caused injury and death, and has affected the health of all who work in it.

For the first 30 years of the plant's history, at least half of the workers were born outside of Canada, and work was divided on ethnic lines for most of the 20th century. The 1910 *Commission on Hours of Labour* concluded that foreign and Newfoundland labourers were "exploited to a greater degree than the native men." The "foreigners" were often employed in the most undesirable jobs - the coke ovens, or blast furnace, or doing "bull work" such as cleaning furnaces or lifting bales of wire.

Because skilled jobs were not open to immigrant workers, they were also barred from the established unions at the plant. As a result, the role of immigrants in the labour movement has been greatly misunderstood and neglected. As labourers, they were characterized as unlikely to organize and protest their working conditions. As leaders, they were seen as "dangerous foreigners" with connections to Bolshevism.

*Come pack your duds and get away
We are not wanted here,
We'll go where hundreds go each day
from hunger and despair
We'll go and seek a country
Where both milk and boney flow,
Go pack your duds for Sydney,
For New Morris told me so!*

-from *St. John's Daily News*, 1903, written by
a Newfoundlander, leaving on *The Kyle* for Sydney

The fact is that the immigrants played an active and important role in the labour movement from the very beginnings of the plant's history.

Indeed, one of the first recorded instances of worker-management tensions at the plant was in 1900 when DISCO police attempted to arrest two Italians involved in an altercation with a foreman. In 1903, Italian workers struck for more pay and better work. When the company tried to bring in new labourers, the Italians "assembled into two pickets of fifty men each, armed with 'heavy clubs, picks, shovels, iron bars' while one striker 'carried a red flag.' The police broke up the pickets, doing 'considerable clubbing' and arresting one or two. Some Italians were blacklisted and left Sydney for steel plants in central Canada.

Slavic workers also carried their collective standards of justice and democracy from the old country. Because of the stigma of the "Red Scare", some were ostracized from the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the 1920's. However, these same people took an active part in the Orthodox Ukrainian Church and many belonged to the Ukrainian Labour Temple. Several of the Slavic labour leaders were black-listed after the 1923 Strike and a few were even deported during the Depression.

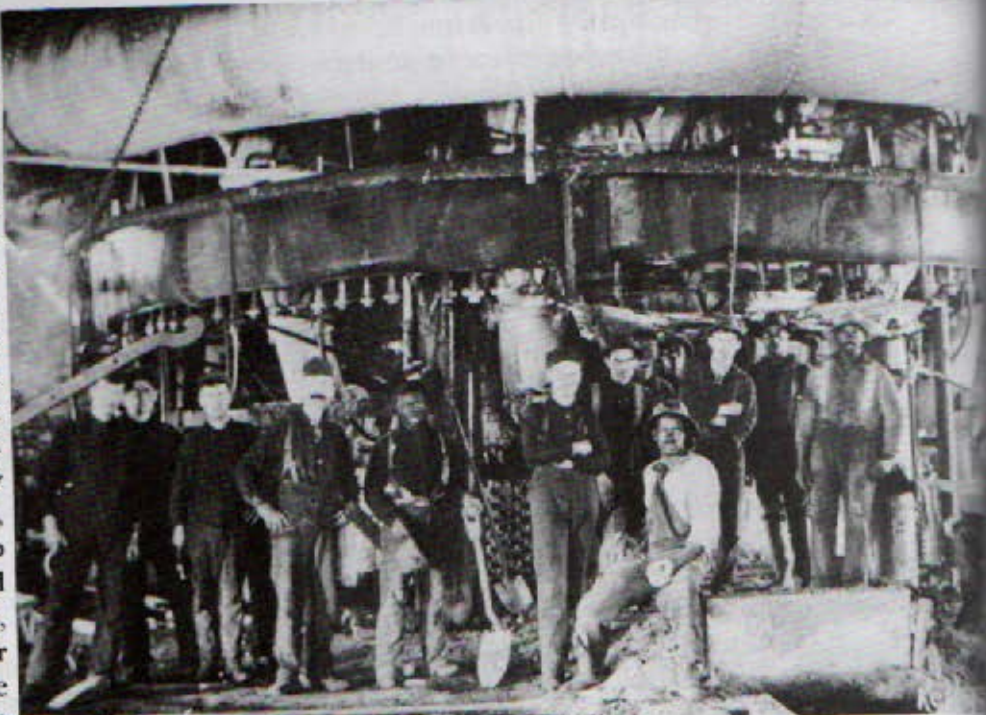


Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, John Beaton Collection

Jews, although they did not work at the steel plant in large numbers, were known for their intellectual support of the labour movement through study groups carried out by labour leaders. Some Jews were "1905-ers", i.e., they took part in the Russian Revolution of 1905. During the Depression, Jewish merchants did much to assure the dignity of the unemployed workers.

When compared to steel workers elsewhere Sydney steel workers are close to average in their participation in strikes, although the Sydney workers have become known for their union militancy.



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, gift of Garfield Moe

TO THE WORKERS OF SYDNEY

A Mass Meeting will be held in the Casino Theatre, Whitney Pier, October 14, 1932, at 8:30 p.m., for the purpose of giving the Steelworkers Delegate to the Soviet Union a sendoff and formulating a list of questions to be answered by the delegate on his return, and giving an explanation of the reasons for sending a delegation to the Soviet Union at the present time.

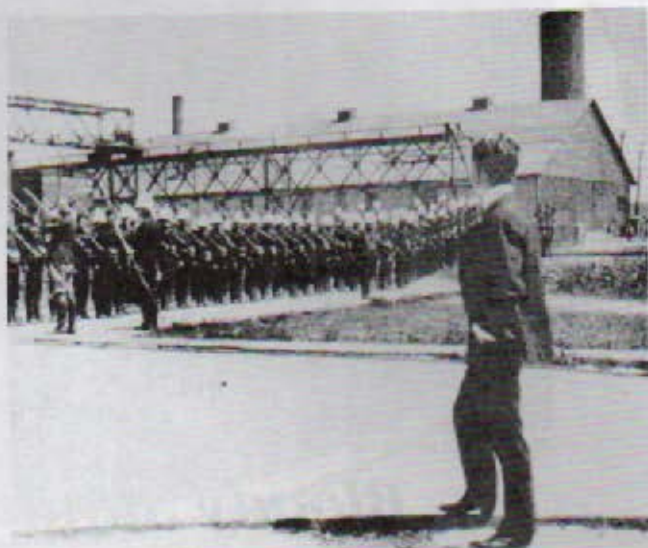
SPEAKERS

J.B. McLachlan, Bob Stewart, Phil Luck, Dan MacKay, Ed Sarman, and the Delegate, M.A. MacKinnon.

COME AND HEAR ROUSING SPEECHES
AND INSPIRING MUSIC!

The steelworker's history of worker solidarity began early in the century with the early financial difficulties of DISCO, when in 1903, the company decided to reduce wages. The move was met with much resistance and in the following year, the Provincial Workmen's Association organized an unsuccessful strike. The army was brought in and not only were wages lowered, but the union was eliminated

Although there were several "trade" unions (such as carpenters or bricklayers), no strong attempt was made to form a general union until the 1920's when once again the steelworkers were threatened with a wage reduction. Recollections of the 1923 strike tell of the police and the barbed wire and military tents at the plant. There were pitched battles and a machine gun was placed on a roof to protect plant property.



Photos courtesy of The Beaton Institute



Canada Day in 1923 is recorded in the spoken memories of many Whitney Pier residents. A walk home from Holy Redeemer Church was referred to as a "riot at Number 4 Gate and in the adjacent streets." That year the strike was lost, but a Royal Commission followed.



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute

Bloody Sunday, July 1, 1923

An eye witness account:

"I saw them coming down Tupper Street four and six abreast . . . and the women taking their children off the street terrified of these army people . . . On Sunday night those provincial police rode down the people at Whitney Pier . . . most of whom were coming from church. An old woman was beaten . . . a nine year old boy was trampled . . . a woman gave premature birth after she was beaten over the head."

The first effective move towards a general union of steelworkers, including immigrants, was the establishment of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee in 1936 under the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Five years later, the first contract between workers and management at the Sydney plant was negotiated. The United Steelworkers of America, Sydney Local 1064, was recognized in the '40's with important strikes in 1943 and 1946. These struggles were the basis of a strong labour tradition in the Canadian steel industry.

In the industry, thanks to the work of the union, there has been a concern for health and safety, and a gradual recognition of the skills required in steel making -- the combination of strength and stamina with intellect and machinery, and now computers. There have also been dramatic changes in hiring practices; since the

1970's, workers from all ethnic and religious backgrounds are found in every department and in managerial positions. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton

DID YOU KNOW?

► The Cape Breton Post declared in 1920 that each time the Steamer Kyle left Newfoundland, it was filled with second class passengers headed for Sydney. By 1921, there were some 2,500 Newfoundlanders in a total Sydney population of 22,545.

► In 1904, management used foreign labour to break strikes, but the workers resisted.



Roman's Story

Those who came Immigrants & Migrants

In 1906, a strong young man of sixteen years left his Polish village and set off for Canada. After long consultation with his family, he was going off to join his steel worker uncle in Sydney, Nova Scotia. In a letter, his uncle promised to look after Roman if he needed help in finding a job and getting settled.

In the region where they lived, Galacia, young people from the farms were leaving home to become migrant farm labourers, or to be industrial workers in Europe's large cities. For Roman, the trip to Canada was simply a longer, more adventurous journey in the search for work.

With money borrowed from his parents, Roman left Poland, travelling through Belgium to catch a boat in England for Quebec City. From there he took a train to Sydney. A horse and buggy "taxi" took him to a boarding house on Ferris Street in Whitney Pier where dozens of his countrymen lived. The next day he started work at the Sydney steel plant where he unloaded bricks and cleaned railway cars for \$1.40 per day. He spent \$13.00 per month on board and sent the remainder back to Poland to pay off the loan for his passage to Sydney.



Photo courtesy of Beaton Institute, gift of Bertha Rusakov

Wives and mothers remaining in the old country waited eagerly for letters. Eventually, some came to Whitney Pier to join their men. However, there were cherished faces never seen again, except in photos.

Leaving the Homeland

The great influx of newcomers to Whitney Pier, which started at the turn of the 20th century, was part of a major immigration to Canada between 1880 and 1914. Part of Canada's industrialization and national expansion, it was the cause of some of the most significant social changes in the country's history. For many who came to the new land, however, "immigration" did not mean immediate settlement and permanent employment. Instead, it meant the continuation of a search for jobs across the country and often into the United States.

Departure, whether from rural Nova Scotia, a Newfoundland fishing village, or much further away, was the result of a combination of complex worldwide factors-- depletion of agricultural and other natural resources, revolutions, natural disasters and ethnic persecutions-- which affected different countries in different ways. Improvements in communication and transportation in the late 19th and early 20th century also helped to establish

patterns of emigration and immigration throughout the world.

The majority of the immigrants were not impoverished. Nor were they of a wealthy class. Instead it was the "middle" group who were most likely to emigrate -- people who saw a chance to better themselves and could afford to do so. The social process of immigration was begun by the news of the jobs, through agents and literature representing the mining or steel companies. Soon, letters home -- often through the village priest -- told of high wages, adventure and the promise of success. Savings sent home to buy more land or to pay off debts sent an even stronger message. Most immigrants -- young single men -- travelled with the name and address of a relative or friend at his destination who would lend money or give advice on medical, legal or business matters.

For the individuals and groups who made the decision to move, the desire for an improved standard of living was the primary driving force. Yet, the ultimate goal of most immigrants was to make enough money to return home and, indeed, many did just that.

Meanwhile in the homeland, wives and children, or sweethearts waited for their men to return, or for the ticket that would carry them away as well.

DID YOU KNOW?

► As in the rest of Canada, preference was shown to Americans, British, Germans, Swedes, and other "Nordic" races. Central, east and south Europeans and Mediterranean people were grudgingly accepted as labourers. Official restriction against Blacks were overcome only by the need for cheap labour in less desirable jobs in mining and steel making. Orientals in Whitney Pier were accepted only in service industries such as laundries and restaurants. For migrants, job preference was given those who were skilled and spoke English: monoglot Gaelic or French-speaking Cape Bretoners were often discriminated against.

Searching for a better life

Rural Cape Bretoners, Nova Scotians, and other Maritimers

Since 1850, and well into this century, the Maritimes experienced a major exodus of both men and women to the "Boston States." When the coal mining industry expanded and the steel making industry began, the migration shifted to a large extent to Industrial Cape Breton. Many who had gone to the States made the decision to return.

The 1901 Census indicates that a vast number of artisans at the Sydney steel plant were born in rural Cape Breton or other areas of the Maritime provinces. They include Nova Scotia Loyalist Blacks, Scots, Irish, and Acadians. Carpentry was one of the most prominent skills of these workers, but electrical, masonry, and blacksmithing and seafaring trades were common as well. While a good proportion of them worked in the rail transportation of coal from the mine to the Pier, most were labourers in the steel plant.

The rural Cape Bretoners and Newfoundlanders had in common a pattern of migration affected not only by seasonal farming, fishing, and woodwork, but also by strikes or recessions that affected the availability of work at the plant.

Newfoundlanders

The interaction between Cape Breton and Newfoundland has long been one of mutual migration. As early as the 1820's, farmers of Irish, Acadian, and Scottish descent moved from Inverness County to the West Coast of Newfoundland, maintaining the strong traditions of the Margaree Valley. Even before that, the Micmac aboriginal people travelled to Newfoundland to hunt and fish, with many remaining there today. By the mid 19th century systemic over-population forced the Newfoundland government to openly encourage out-migration. At that time, fishing communities from the outports of

Newfoundland moved many of their people to the north and western coasts of Cape Breton. Neil's Harbour and Big Bras d'Or are examples of these settlements of Newfoundland fisherfolk.

When the industrial revolution finally exploded in Cape Breton, the work possibilities offered to Newfoundlanders was simply an extension of historical patterns.

The Newfoundlanders who responded to the call for workers at the Sydney steel plant came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. They were Irish Catholics, or Devon and Dorset English Protestants from Eastern or Central Newfoundland, especially the Avalon Peninsula. Or they were French from Newfoundland's west coast. As early as 1901, there were about 500 Newfoundlanders in Whitney Pier. In this group, there were about 40 families.

The exodus from Newfoundland continued well into this century: in 1920, *The Cape Breton Post* declared that each time the steamer *Kyle* left Newfoundland, it was filled with second class passengers headed for Sydney. By 1921, there were about 2,500 Newfoundland-born people in a total Sydney population of 22,545. If "ethnic" Newfoundlanders were included, this would have been a far larger number. The majority of the Newfoundlanders were single Irish Catholic male labourers, most of whom lived initially in boarding houses near the steel plant.

Others, of Methodist or Anglican religious persuasion were more likely to be skilled craftsmen at the steel plant, or they were fishermen with their own boats. This group of workers often had their families with them.

Americans

Many experienced workers for the early Sydney plant, both management and labourers, came from American steel cities such as Pittsburgh, Birmingham and Chicago. Because they were employed for their specific skills, they tended to be older than the local steel workers. In the plant's

first year of production, these American tradesmen included two iron worker foremen, aged 60 and 37, a carpenter aged 63, and an engineer aged 45. Most of them lived with other skilled workers on Bay Street in Whitney Pier.

There was another group of Americans who worked more directly with the steelmaking process. During 1901 and 1902, DISCO'S Furnace Superintendent J.H. Means, an American, arranged for about 100 Black steelworkers to come from Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. They were housed with their families in the Coke Ovens area of the Pier, often in houses that were poorly heated. By 1904, "a number of coloured furnace workers" left for Colorado where they expected to find employment. It is believed that only one of the entire group remained in Whitney Pier.

The Europeans

Europeans who came to Cape Breton often began their journey as migratory workers in their own countries. These migrations were the result of drastic land reforms in the mid 18th century when peasants were allowed to own their own land at the end of feudalism. Increased population, the burden of taxes and the rapid change to commercial market farming forced many farmers to sell their small holdings to large companies. Those who kept their small farms could not pass on a living to sons and daughters, so they, along with the farmers who were bought out, worked as farm labourers.

The industrialization of Europe caused this pattern of migratory farm labour to change. A vast array of urban labouring jobs were created, and a broadening of regional work migration led to the beginnings of international migrations. This coincided with dramatic political changes. Ideas on social democracy and class consciousness, combined with an awakening of nationalism throughout the European continent, resulted in discontent, and even rebellion. Emigration to North America offered not only jobs, but political freedom. Nationalism found even greater possibilities in the new land as young workers discovered the importance of the solidarity found in language, religion, and other ethnic traditions. Some European governments discouraged

emigration, but by 1914, many hundreds of thousands had left their homes, never to return.

Some ethnic groups came to Whitney Pier and did not stay. The 1901 census, for instance, indicates that Scandinavians from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden were steel workers or seafaring traders. They were few in number and did not stay in the community, although some actually brought their families for a short time. Small numbers of French and Belgian people also came; again few stayed.

Over the years, Whitney Pier has been settled by the occasional person born in Britain, some coming as workers in the early years, others as war brides after the two wars. Usually, though, Whitney Pier was not considered a likely place for the settlement of British-born persons.

South Italians were among the first Europeans to come to Whitney Pier. They came by way of the United States under the Boston contractor, Thomas Cossolini, to provide skilled construction work in building the Sydney steel plant. One of the many important projects they completed was the laying of water lines from Sydney River to the steel plant; the same water lines are still used by the city of Sydney. It was understood by the Immigration Branch that these workers were "sojourners," that they would leave the country as soon as the work was done. However, many stayed and settled down, bring their families from Italy or the United States.

Hungarians also came early in the history of Whitney Pier. In 1901, on one street there were more than 60 Hungarian workers, all called "labourers." In actual fact, they were skilled iron workers, brought by DISCO specifically for the start-up of the plant. Some of them were met in Halifax by the employment clerk of the company. The specialized skills of the Hungarians may be traced to the fact that Hungary underwent industrialization and rural land reform at an earlier date and at a faster pace than other states in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many Hungarians left Whitney Pier as a result of a strike in 1904, and went to the Niagara region of Ontario or to industrial cities in the United States. However, some Hungarian names remain, such as Nagy, Ambruse, Manly, Mazelin, and Rotz.

Slavs, especially Ukrainians and Poles, but also including Slovaks, Slovenes, Bulgarians, Czechs, Serbs, Croations, Macedonians, and

Russians began to arrive in large numbers by 1905. There is evidence of small numbers of Slavs in Whitney Pier as early as 1901.

The Poles and Ukrainians came mainly from what is now the western part of Ukraine, called Galicia. Although they came from the same region, they maintained ethnic differences based on history, religion, and language. There is evidence that Russians were involved in the heavy wood construction of the steel and coal piers.



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, gift of E. Moraff Davis

The Jewish People

Although Jewish immigrants to Cape Breton came from east Europe, they must be considered separately from Slavs, not only because of ethnic differences, but also because of the circumstances of their life in Europe and their departure from the homeland.

Compulsory army service, pogroms, and being forced by prejudice and economics into ghettos, all of these factors made life almost unbearable for European Jews in the latter part of the 19th century. In response to these conditions, many young Jews took part in the 1904-1905

revolution against the Russian government.

The Whitney Pier Jews came from the eastern part of Poland known as The Pale, and from Romania and other regions. They often left the country illegally, or bribed officials to allow them to cross borders. Most went to the United States, especially New York, but it was not long before the Cape Breton mining and steel boom caused them to make their way north. They set up peddling routes from industrial Cape Breton, and Whitney Pier became one of their major settlement points. When they came to Canada, it was most often with their families. There was no returning to their country of birth, which both rejected them, and would punish them for leaving.

Mediterranean People

The immigration from the Mediterranean region to Cape Breton began in the same way as the east European experience, through regional migration. The reasons for Mediterranean migrations are based in trading and the roots go back a thousand years.

Poverty, wars, and the pull of the New World caused the modern out-migration of Lebanese and Syrians to peak between 1900 and 1914. Annually, 15,000 people left their homes for the United States, Brazil and Canada. Halifax was the destination of many simply because it was on the ship's route to New York. In the towns of Nova Scotia -- Yarmouth, Amherst, North Sydney and Sydney -- these newcomers continued their traditional buying and selling. However, in industrial areas such as Whitney Pier and Sydney, many added manual labour to their means of making a living.

West Indians

The Emancipation of the Slaves in the West Indies in 1834 resulted in land reforms that benefited the plantation owners rather than the newly freed slaves. By 1850 the West Indies were barely able to sustain the rapidly increasing Black population. Between 1897 and 1914, over 20,000 people left the small islands. Barbados, from where most of the permanent Cape Breton Black immigrants came, had over 1000 persons per square mile, and most of the island was

under cultivation and not available for habitation. In 1910, the West Indies Royal Commission suggested emigration as a solution to the economic problems of the islands. In fact, this only confirmed what had been common practice for over half a century.

American imperialism in the West Indies and Central America also had a role to play in the massive out-migration. The coaling station in St. Lucia, the building of the Panama Canal, and the Cuban banana plantations all provided work for thousands of West Indian Blacks who moved seasonally with the available work.

In 1909, anxious correspondence between immigration officials questioned the landing of West Indian Blacks in the Maritimes, which was a direct violation of Canada's immigration policy at the time. West Indians, both men and women, continued to land at various Maritime ports in fishing and trading boats, taking trains to Industrial Cape Breton.

The immigration authorities admitted that the Blacks were "well-behaved, well-dressed, and well-spoken" and were not a burden on the public welfare system. They were also in great demand as good workers in the mines and the steel plant, and the women as domestics. The permanent immigrants from this work migration to Cape Breton have settled in New Waterford, Glace Bay and especially Whitney Pier.

Not all West Indian Immigrants were Blacks. About 20 white West Indians came at the same time, also to work in the mines or the steel plant, but few maintained any connection with their Black countrymen

Chinese

Political violence, as well as overcrowding precipitated China's out-migration. The Chinese took an active role in the American and Canadian gold rushes of the late 19th century, but they are particularly known for their part in the construction of the CPR. The Chinese who came to Cape Breton before 1920 were part of the dispersion of Chinese people out of work after the completion of the CPR. In Cape Breton, as in other parts of Canada, they provided laundry and food services to industrial workers. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton

DOMINION IRON & STEEL CO., LIMITED SYDNEY, N. S.

Reference No. 3427
Name: *Hirgula Mulak* Trade: *Laborer*
Age: 25 Date: *May 18th 1908*
Address: *636 First Rd. Gen. 1* Place: *Salvia* Date of Birth: *Jan 18th 1884* Married: *Yes*
Height: 160 Weight: 56 Eyes: *Blue* Hair: *Black* Complexion: *Fair*
Occupation: *Wife* *Wolquay Pottery* *Salvia* Special Children: *9*
If British Subject: *no* If Naturalized: *no* Date: _____
English: *no* Write: *no* Native Language: *Lithuanian*
Previous Employer: _____ Address: _____
Occupation: _____ Why Leave: _____
This Home: _____ Where: _____

EMPLOYMENT RECORD

Key	E-Entered	T-Transferred	C-Change Number	L-Left Employer		
KEY	DATE	CHRON NO.	DEPARTMENT	OCCUPATION	RATE	REMARKS
E	May 1908	5497	C.O.	Lab.		over Acc.
E	July 4/08					
E	Feb 14/09	6248	G.P.	DO		
T	June 18/09	3949	O.H.			over Acc.
E	June 28/09					
E	March 31/09	3631	O.H.	DO		no date of discharge
E	April 4/09	2095	Mech.	Help Forge		former Acc.
E	April 31/09					
E	April 12/09	442	Al. 400	Lab.		
T	Aug 22/09	3971	O.H.	DO		
T	Feb 2/10	7061	Mello	Lab.		Paid off
E	Apr 9/10					
E	May 18/10	8216	Pl Mello	DO		

Employment records courtesy of SYSCO.

PENSION PURPOSES
FATHER: *GENERAL* 23 yrs
SERVICE: *6-36*
Reference No. *78-1*
Trade: _____ Date: *October 14th 1906*
ACTIVE
Name: *Christ Majich* Sex: *Male* Date of Birth: *Oct 29 1888* Place of Birth: *Velachy, Hungary* Height: *5'11"* Weight: *170*
Age: *28* Date: *Oct 29 1888* Place of Birth: *Velachy, Hungary* Height: *5'11"* Weight: *170*
Signature: *Louis Petrovich* Address: *Kayser Ave #298 Toronto Ont.*
Signature: *Christ Majich*



Whitney Pier Historical Society Photo, from N.S. Information Service

Where they lived

The present day landscape of Whitney Pier is full of variety. There are many different types of homes, most are wood-frame construction, with an occasional brick or concrete structure. The houses are surrounded by trees and low wooden fences and many boast bountiful vegetable gardens or profusions of flowers, whether in small plots or large yards. "Yard

art" --wooden butterflies or plastic wind vanes or life size figures -- invite inspection and discussion. Mechanical noises come from outbuilding workshops where things are made or fixed, asserting the self-reliance of the man. There are verandas and front steps where people sit in summer to say hello to those who pass. How did this landscape evolve and how did it result in a place called Whitney Pier?



E. Beaton Photos



Photo courtesy of the United Church Archives

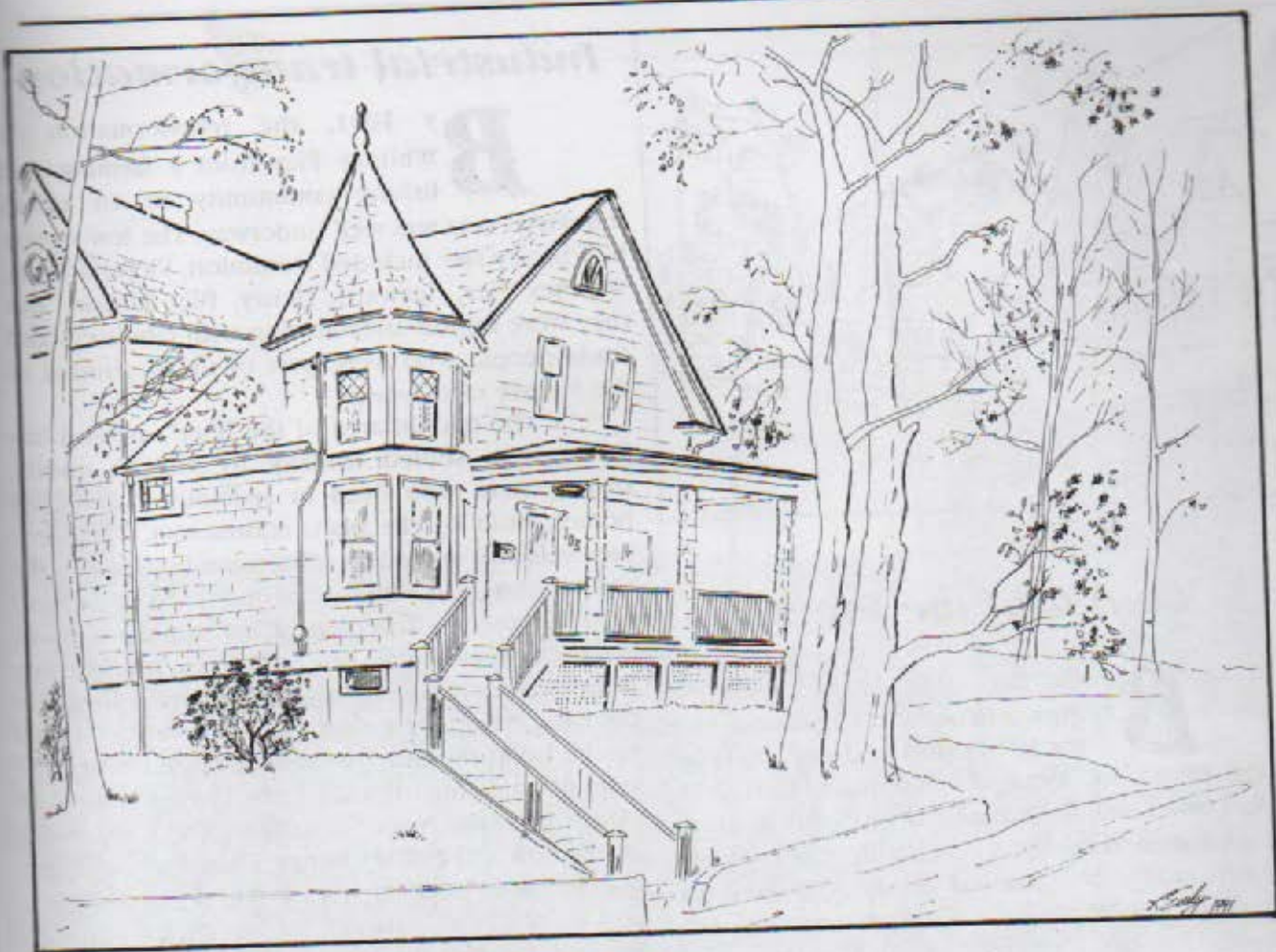


Photo by Raytel, courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Photo courtesy of the United Church Archives

Top left: an example of an "Amherst House." **Top right:** Bonny View Hotel on Brow Street, once a popular accommodation for steel company dignitaries. **Middle left:** A "Sback," once used as private living quarters for young single steel workers. **Middle right:** Bay Street scene, United Fisherman's Hall in the foreground. **Bottom:** Kolonia, or "Hunky Town" where many people of Slavic origin lived.



Farmers and fishers

The land which was to become Whitney Pier belonged in the early years to a number of families, including the Carlins, Hankards, Fitzgeralds, Muggahs, Lorways, Brookmans, Burchells and Ferris. These families occupied a number of large farms; they were also sea traders and captains or held important government positions relating to the local area. They dwelt in large, widely separated, hill-top houses elaborately decorated with pediments, turrets, gingerbread work on eaves and verandas, as well as numerous dormers and porch additions.

Also in the 19th century, fishermen lived along the shore of the future Whitney Pier, extending into South Bar. The early sea-going activity of the area was also connected with South Bar's International Pier which shipped coal from the General Mining Association's mines at Low

Point and the North Side. Only archaeological evidence remains of the homes, lobster factories, mines and piers of this area.

E. Beaton Photo





Coal and the Piers

By the late 19th century, with the completion of the International Pier in the 1870's, and the Dominion Pier in the 1890's, the focus of community life shifted. In fact, the name "International Pier" was given to the area around the piers. The loading of coal and the off-loading of consumer goods accounted for the early settlement of a large number of employees for the Dominion Coal Company and related businesses like the Cape Breton Electric tram company. Dominion Street, then called "Pier Road" became the radius for residential, business and entertainment development.

Both shipping and rail transportation began to play a major role in the livelihood of the working community. Jobs in 1901 included trimmer, engineer, brakeman, fireman, teamster, coal shipper, miner, oiler, pier master, and weigh man and coal section man. To the present time, the shipping of coal from the "Pier" is an important activity for Cape Breton's industrial area.

Some of the few company houses in Whitney Pier were built in the 1890's on Dominion Street. Built for railway workers for the Dominion Coal Company, they were mainly double houses with a central peaked gable. There were also a few "L" shaped, large, single family homes, probably for supervisors.

Industrial transformation

By 1901, the transformation of Whitney Pier from a farming and fishing community to an urban industrial area was well underway. The few streets in Whitney Pier included Dominion, Victoria Road, Whitney Pier, Seaward, Henry, Bay, Lingan. But they were rapidly over-flowing with labourers and tradespeople who were part of the beginning of the Sydney steel works.

The middle area of the "Pier", around Bay Street, was settled initially by DISCO middle management who lived in spacious 2 1/2 story homes, built by the plant contractors. The same area was also settled by tradesmen involved in the construction and subsequent operation of the steel plant: riveters, carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, electricians, painters, bricklayers, plumbers, pipe fitters, carpenters, millwrights. They were hired for their expertise in steelmaking, and were essential to the building and subsequent operation of the steel plant. Some came from the United States and others from the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal works at Trenton and Sydney Mines. Others were simply construction tradesmen from rural Cape Breton and the Maritimes. These were among the first steel workers to bring their families to settle in Whitney Pier.

Many lived in what came to be known as "Amherst" houses, the materials supplied by the Amherst firm Rhodes and Curry which was very involved in "building" industrial communities across Nova Scotia. There was undoubtedly some





Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, John Beaton Collection

company housing in the Bay Street area during this period. But the only remaining examples are two double houses of 1880's Massachusetts urban industrial style built on the top of the hill overlooking the plant.

At the same time, another part of Whitney Pier was literally teeming with life as thousands of Europeans and a small number of American Blacks tried to find adequate housing in the area next to the steel Plant. The company offered some accommodation on the plant property. Letters from Blast Furnace Superintendent J.H. Means indicate that skilled American Black steel workers lived in houses owned by the company. It is not clear where these were located. Italian construction workers lived on plant property, in "bunk houses" located between Railroad Street and the mills, in an area called "Shackville."

Other housing for single steel workers was at the Breton Hotel, a mainly single level structure, built just inside the Coke Ovens gate at the bottom of Lingan Road around 1895. According to newspaper reports it held 1000 men in 225 rooms. This same "hotel" was moved piece by piece, on flatcars, in 1901 to the bottom of Ferris and Bryan Streets, where the sections were converted into double houses for plant tradesmen, mainly construction workers. Oral tradition has it that some of the sections burned because they were so close to the railroad tracks. About 40 "cottage residences" of various shapes and sizes resulted from the dismantling of the Breton Hotel. A few years later the same cluster of buildings became the rented homes of a large number of Slavic peoples who continued their traditions of gardening and even kept a few



animals such as cows, geese and chickens.

Thus the area became known as "Kolonias" or "The Valley." It also was known pejoratively as "Hunky Town." That name remains as a proud acknowledgement of the neighbourhood's history.

The steel company also operated large boarding houses in Whitney Pier, some of which are used today as single or double family dwellings or apartment buildings. It is not certain whether the Bonny View Hotel on Brow St., operated by Jane Drummond, was owned by the steel company, but research shows that it was a popular accommodation for company dignitaries.

Private boarding houses or "hotels" for single, male steelworkers were more common, however. Logically, these were located close to the plant. The family, ethnic and religious ties of the workers' former communities were extended into the boarding house situations: Cheticamp Acadians, Victoria County Scottish Presbyterians, Irish Catholic Newfoundlanders, Prince Edward Islanders, and Slavs all boarded with their own kind, forming small communities away from home. The few single women who lived as boarders usually had kin connections with their host families, at least when they first arrived in Whitney Pier.

Life in the boarding houses was not luxurious. One story is told of a "Russian" boarding house on Ferris St. which housed two dozen Slavic workers. At meal time, each worker produced his own spoon with which he helped himself from a common pot. Like many of the boarding houses at the time, "beds were never cold," that is, the men shared the beds in "shifts" just as they worked in shifts. For all the inconvenience, however, it may be said that the

boarding houses helped to form the ethnic ties that were so important in the development of Whitney Pier.

The "shacks" were an alternate form of private accommodation for plant workers, mainly young single men of Newfoundland origin. The shacks were owned by private business interests including Gallivan, Nathanson, and Brody. Some of the "shacks," located on Bay Street west of Victoria Road were two storey wooden row buildings with a veranda railing on the upper level. The rows surrounded a "court yard" where the men washed up at an outdoor pump. The living quarters were simple but serviceable: one room with a bed, a stove, table and chair. Bathroom facilities were out-of-doors. Other shacks, closer to the Coke Ovens, just off Lingan Road, were one level, double occupancy, with a sloped roof. All the shacks were wood frame construction, with shingle sheathing and no foundation. They were used until the 1930's, mainly by Newfoundland workers who were likely to continue seasonal migrations back and forth between Cape Breton and their home communities. Then, until the early 1970's, a few of the "shack" buildings were moved from their original locations and converted into family dwellings.

The businesses at Whitney Pier usually were buildings with "false" or "boom" fronts. Whether Canadian born or newcomers to Whitney Pier, the people who operated businesses lived close to their work, just like the steel workers. Almost invariably, they occupied the upper level or rear of their business establishments. Often, business people provided boarding for single relatives, most of whom worked in the family business.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The extent of the early development of Whitney Pier is indicated in the community's population figures. In 1903, the population of Whitney Pier was 4,000. By 1913, it was about 8,000. Construction activity was also significant: in 1900, 39 building permits were issued for Whitney Pier. There were 194 issued in 1910.



E. Beaton Photo

Community transitions

The settlement of Whitney Pier did not stabilize until after the First World War. Until 1914, most of the immigrant population -- young single males -- continued migratory patterns carried from the old country. They travelled throughout North America in the search of more attractive jobs or better working conditions. Railway construction, railways, lumbering, mining, as well as farm labour provided jobs for these migrants. Cape Bretoners and Newfoundlanders also remained a migratory workforce, for the seasonal operations of fishing and farming continued to be carried out around work at the steel plant.

During the 1920's and 30's, the look of the "boom town" society of Whitney Pier began to change. Owner-built homes began to become prominent as more and more women and families joined the men who had arrived earlier. Steel workers began to buy homes previously rented from the company or from established landlords.

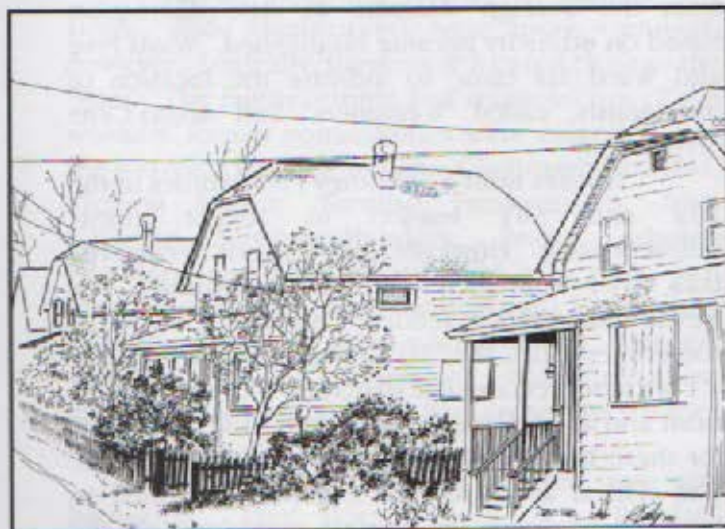
With the permanent settlement of immigrants and migrants, and movement of the elite over to Sydney, neighbourhoods were formed on ethnic lines. West Indian Blacks, Slavs and

Italians lived close to the plant; Anglo-Celts lived farther away. Newfoundlanders, originally close to the plant and close to the bottom of the social scale of workers, gradually moved up and away from the "foreign" element as class distinction based on ethnicity became established. Ward Five and Ward Six came to indicate the location of immigrants, called "foreigners" and Anglo-Celts respectively.

Houses built by Whitney Pier families in the 20's and 30's tended to reflect ethnic differentiation. However, they did not necessarily take styles from their cultural background. The Newfoundlanders tended toward what is sometimes called the "2/3 Georgian house". This is a 1 3/4 story rectangular structure with a gable-end front and a flat or medium-pitched roof. The plans for these houses were available at the steel plant. The central and southern Europeans seemed to have been drawn to several variations of the compact 1 1/2 story "worker's cottage." Many of these styles are found in a pattern book published in St. Paul, Minnesota, and distributed by Chappell's Building Supplies, or by Stephen's Building Supplies. However, the floor plans were frequently altered to fit their perceptions of space priorities. The exteriors of these "cottages"

appeared to have some European characteristics. The houses are square or rectangular, low, with four-sided or half-hipped roofs. One style which has a Bukovynian style roof is sometimes known as the "Polish house" although it was popular with Ukrainians, Croations and other groups. There is one feature that was common to almost all of the houses built by the steelworkers: dormers and porch additions with a closed-in front porch.

Much of the housing for steelworkers and their families during the 20's, 30's, and 40's was built on land owned by original Pier families who had left farming and entered the real estate business. The entrepreneurial activities of these families initially included single and semi-detached rows of rental units with an interior design similar to the 2/3 Georgian style. These units were located mainly in the areas close to the plant, in the "Coke Ovens." The original tenants represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but as time passed, West Indians predominated. Many bought their houses from their landlords after World War II.



One of these is Railroad Street, which continues to be called "Fitzgerald Row," after the original landlord. This street was also known as "Scab Avenue" for its large families of Newfoundlanders, some of whom felt forced to work during strikes. More recently the street has been called "Widow's Lane" in recognition of the many deaths of steelworkers, either from accident or work-related illness.

The end of the boom era

The end of World War II brought other changes to the Pier. The government's war-time decision to focus on the steel industry in Central Canada, along with the return of job-seeking soldiers to a Post-War Recession, caused a major out-migration from Whitney Pier. Many steel workers and their families moved to Hamilton, Sault Ste.-Marie and even to steel cities in the United States. There was a corresponding decline in Whitney Pier's development.



E. Beaton Photo



Community housing initiatives

Whitney Pier housing of the 30's included co-op housing which was a part of the early Antigonish Movement and the work of Father Jimmy Tompkins and Father Moses Coady. These houses were built on Matilda, Taylor and St. Ann's Streets, an area known at the time as "Princeville." These houses are typical 1 3/4 story with gabled roof with the front door at either the gable end or the gable side. Their distinction is a large front sitting room window and three smaller upstairs windows tucked under the eaves.

However, the early fifties also saw a revival of the co-operative housing movement as several more streets in Ward VI followed the styles (more or less) of the co-op houses of the 30's. Both co-op housing endeavours were sponsored by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, and involved Anglo-Celtic and Acadian people in Ward VI and West Indian Blacks in Ward V.

Another cooperative venture was initiated by a group of steel workers in 1972. The technology for "Insulite" houses was developed by Whitney Pier resident, Norman Weiner. It was a way to use "slag," a by-product of steel making, to build homes. Several dozen homes were constructed all over Cape Breton, a number of them in Whitney Pier. They are one-story houses with an exterior "cottage" design, and resemble the "stucco" houses that are popular in Western Canada.

The 1970's saw the advent of government involvement in housing in Whitney Pier. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Commission's "Neighbourhood Improvement Program" coincided with a national energy crisis, but, in Sydney, as a result of a study carried out by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, it also acknowledged the housing needs of common people. In an effort to allow people to stay in their homes for at least

Photo courtesy of The Francis Xavier University Archives



another 20 years, the program provided roofing, doors and siding to many senior residents. As a result, the traditional wood shingle siding and wooden doors on older residences in Whitney Pier were replaced with aluminum or vinyl siding and aluminum doors. The program resulted in demolition of residences close to the coke ovens. New bungalow-style houses were built on Tupper, Hankard and Laurier Streets, an interesting contrast to the early worker housing that dominated the area for the previous 50 years. The program, which combined the resources of municipal, provincial and federal governments, also erected

E. Beaton Photo



senior citizen's apartments on William and Carlin Streets, and built double and single unit homes in the newer streets of Whitney Pier, including Bras d'Or Drive and MacDonald Crescent. The three-tiered, low-level apartment block on Church Street was constructed at this time as well. Another community housing project was the construction of "shell houses" on East Broadway in the 1970's.

Appropriate as these steps seemed at the time -- especially in the context of a polluted environment -- the resettlement of a large proportion of the Ward V had a disruptive effect, particularly on the Black community of Whitney Pier. In the years following this radical program of improvement, urban planners have realized that culture must be as seriously considered as the economy or even physical health.

In 1990 the Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing Society was established to respond to the need to maintain community ties. With the closure and tear-down of the coke ovens and the elimination of the former pollution, the group has established a co-operative to rebuild in the area of the "coke ovens" which had been demolished in the 1970's. Young families are working together to build new homes in an area where memories were not demolished.

In Whitney Pier today, there are other developments which reflect change. The Seaton Foundation, a housing initiative with religious sponsorship, assists families who wish to build their own homes but find bank mortgages too expensive. A number of these homes are located in Whitney Pier, but they are indistinguishable from other ordinary homes, and they are not in "designated" areas, thus ensuring the dignity of the residents who have built them. Also, the distinctive "dullness" of housing for people with fixed incomes is being eliminated. Since 1989, Whitney Pier's apartment buildings have been brightened with attractive and various colours and other exterior decoration. These possibilities, as well as a chance to live in a safe and friendly environment, encourage young families to move to Whitney Pier. Thus a new generation of Pier residents also find a pride of place. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton



E. Beaton Photos



DID YOU KNOW?

► A rare period of work equality occurred during the Second World War when many Whitney Pier women worked at the Steel Plant. They worked at a variety of jobs from the coke ovens to the bar mill; from crane operation to the machine shop, but they found that they were subject to the same ethnic stratification that applied to the men. When the war was over, those well-paying jobs were taken back by the men returning from the war.



Photo courtesy of Ron Caplan

Women and their work

There were relatively few women in the first years of Whitney Pier. In fact, females (including children) made up less than one quarter of the population at the turn of the 20th century, most being wives and daughters of farmers, fishermen, or skilled craftsmen hired to build the plant. As the decade progressed the relative imbalance of women became even more pronounced as thousands of labourers joined the steel plant work force.

In those early years, catering to the steel plant's work force was the most prominent source of income for women. Almost every household had single male boarders, the work in this "cash crop" being carried out by the female relatives of the owner of the house. Single women also ran boarding houses or "hotels." In 1901, three young women of Scottish descent from rural Cape Breton operated a boarding house on the Shore Road for men from Poland, the USA, Newfoundland and rural Cape Breton. They employed a female live-in domestic, also of Scottish descent and from rural Cape Breton. Other women ran the popular

"corner stores" in their homes, selling food and other essential items to workers. They also provided sewing and laundry services. Jewish women took charge of family businesses -- usually dry goods and groceries -- while their husbands and fathers were out peddling in the countryside.

Women's work opportunities outside the home were limited in the boom period of the Sydney's steel industry. The census of 1901 shows that a few women did dressmaking, and clerical jobs like bookkeeping. One Whitney Pier woman worked as a telephone operator, another as a teacher. The most common "outside" work for women was domestic service. Indeed, as early as 1909, the demand for domestics in Canada made the entry of West Indian Black immigrant women possible in the face of strict policies against Black immigration. Because of the availability of such jobs in Sydney, West Indian Black women were the first immigrant group to comprise a large number of women in Whitney Pier.

Women began to arrive in Whitney Pier in large numbers after World War I, wives and



Fitzgerald Studio Photo

children coming to be re-united with fathers and husbands. It is the arrival of women and children and their subsequent settlement as families that marks the establishment of Whitney Pier as a "community." The trend continued throughout the 1920's and 1930's, and again after World War II. Sometimes the new arrivals were barely remembered by the men who had come earlier. Many dreams were crushed.

Some young women, faced with the harsh economic realities of the homelands, immigrated as "adventurers," following brothers or cousins, usually to do housework, but in the hope of finding a husband. Others were betrothed to men they had never met. More than one Whitney Pier woman can tell of doing farm work or "in-service," to earn money for passage and to build up a "dowry" of clothes and linens, all in anticipation of marriage to a young man known only by a photo sent in the mail. On the long sea voyage to Halifax, such a woman might meet other young women from all over the world with the same plans. The last part of the journey, the train ride to Sydney, must have been lonesome and filled with doubts, until she was finally delivered to the house of friends from the homeland where she would meet her future husband.

As families became the norm, single women had a particularly difficult time, both socially and in terms of work. One elderly woman, a widow, worked as the janitor at Eastmount School for many years, living in the "attic" with no running water. Her job was to sweep, dust and keep the coal fires going. With extremely limited social services, the single woman with children had to seek out whatever resources she could, the orphanage being the alternative. When the wife of a Jewish merchant was widowed as a young woman and she

took in sewing to enable her to support and educate her three daughters. A French-speaking widow from Newfoundland did housework in other peoples' homes in an effort to keep her children with her. In many tragic cases, the single mother was not able to keep her children with her again. As in other male-dominated Canadian industrial towns, some women were forced to turn to prostitution or to operate "bootlegging" establishments. Older residents can still point out the houses of these activities, but there is now a clearer understanding of society's role in the Pier's dark side of survival.

Gradually, as education for women became more widespread, they began to replace men as cashiers and clerks, and they became teachers and nurses, x-ray and lab technicians, and secretaries. The inspiration for these advances came from a variety of sources: the Social Gospel work of Deaconesses of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches who taught English and good health practices; the public health work of the legendary VON Mable Dubbin who delivered thousands of Pier babies; the social work of the Sisters of St. Martha and the women of the Salvation Army whose sympathetic interest in family problems saved many from destitution; and the secular and religious teachers of Whitney Pier, almost entirely women until 1960. The legacy of self-reliance and

hard work is evidenced every day by the many women in business in Whitney Pier.

Throughout the history of Whitney Pier, women contributed to the family income by using their traditional and business skills; but they were also responsible for managing household finances, for the health of the family, and for the million and one other tasks that keep a family going. The work of women in the home went beyond the care of the family's immediate material needs. Women have preserved the ethnic traditions that remain such an integral part of Whitney Pier's identity. They have maintained this heritage through foodways, the making of clothing for ceremonial occasions, and the maintenance of religious rituals in the home and the ethnic community.

The participation of Whitney Pier women in voluntary work has gone on since the beginnings of the community, but in recent years women are being openly recognized for that contribution. The churches and the synagogue of Whitney Pier have benefited greatly from their fund-raising activities, their talent in the performing arts, and their intellectual abilities in drawing together the histories of communities. Benevolent societies, the various

altar societies and women's auxiliaries are examples of the many women's organizations in Whitney Pier. Today we see that Pier women have gone beyond local leadership roles to take part in regional and national organizations in religious, professional, ethnic, and educational capacities. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton



Photo courtesy of Whitney Pier Historical Society

Well baby clinic, Community House, Victoria Road, early 1900's



E. Beaton Photos



Top left: St. Michael's Polish Benefit Society Hall. **Top right:** The Ukrainian Hall on Swan Street. **Middle left:** International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Hall, formerly the Croation Hall. **Middle right:** Menelik Etbiopian Hall on Laurier Street. **Bottom left:** Formerly Orange Hall, Furnace Street. **Bottom right:** Formerly, the Ukrainian Labour Temple.



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, gift of Mike Ratushny

Benevolent Societies

Benefit or benevolent societies have been common in industrial communities since the middle of the 19th century. They were a sort of community insurance against the insecurity of a dangerous workplace, especially when the company controlling the industry made no provision for its workers' illnesses or accidents. The origins of benefit societies are found in the trade or craft guilds of several hundred years ago. In Canada, benefit societies were usually based in ethnic groups, although differing political ideologies might find two or more benefit societies within one national or racial group. Benefit societies were often based in religion, directly or indirectly. This

was true of both the immigrant and Canadian-born groups whose culture and social life were strongly based in religion. Each society was distinct with its own badges, banners, sashes and sometimes hats that identified members. Often, but not always, the various benefit societies built halls for its functions.

In Whitney Pier, the majority of benefit societies were made up of steel workers and their families, with the decision-making powers usually held by men. But this was not always the case. For example, women were active in the Ukrainian St. Nicholas Society, and women were called the "True Blues" of the Orange Lodge.

The Daughters of Jacob Aid Society was an example of a benefit society that was neither male

dominated nor related directly to the steel industry. The Daughters of Jacob Aid Society was incorporated in Whitney Pier in 1913, its membership consisting of Jewish women over the age of 18. The earliest meetings were held in the Adath Israel Synagogue on Mount Pleasant Street, but by 1930, meetings were held in the homes of the members. Dues of 25 cents a month were collected and continued at that rate until 1950 when they went up to \$5.00 a year.

The objectives and activities of the Jacob Aid Society were similar to other benefit societies in the Pier, i.e. to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of the community. This had several very practical applications in the work carried out by the society's committees. The Sick Committee rendered help to sick members and their families, either through visiting or paying for the services of professional care. The society also assisted members seeking medical help outside Cape Breton. A Funeral Committee, upon being notified of a death in the community, arranged for the deceased to be attended to according to Jewish law and customs.

The Daughters of Jacob or "Ladies' Aid" also played an active role in the social life of the Jewish community. Concerts at the YMHA, Jewish movies at a local theatre, and summer picnics were all part of the effort to retain Jewish traditions and to give young and old a chance to renew acquaintances. Every summer they rented a field where they held a community picnic. All of the Jewish families in Industrial Cape Breton were involved. The children were piled into trucks and every available car transported the members and their relatives from Sydney, Glace Bay and New Waterford.

The helpful work of the Society went beyond the immediate Jewish community. When Jewish persons arrived from overseas and had to look for work in other parts of Canada, they were fed, given railway tickets and enough money to find a room and food for a month.

All of these activities required money as well as the efforts of hard working women. The Daughters of Jacob found that bingo games, card parties, rummage sales and afternoon teas were the most effective forms of fund raising.

In the 1960's, when the Pier Jewish community became very small, the Yom Kipper fast was broken at the Synagogue. All of the food was brought in the day before the feast and the

members became like a family as they prepared for the great feast.

According to the Charter of the Daughters of Jacob, "as long as there are six members, the organization will continue." In July 1990, the Aid Society ceased to exist for there are only three active members left.

The Daughters of Jacob Society was one of many benevolent/ benefit or aid societies established in the Whitney Pier area in the early part of the 20th century. While some have disappeared, many of them continue to be active to the present time. The benevolent societies made the difficult transition to another land easier for many immigrants and offered solidarity, protection against discrimination, and a buffer in times of hardship. For instance, during the Depression, the Co-operative movement in Whitney Pier set up a "Co-op Farm" on Ligan Road, which had about 50 members growing vegetables and sharing their crops at harvest time.

Obtaining employment was an important economic benefit of the networking provided by the social occasions of organizations. This means of getting a job was to continue for many years.

Another of the major functions of many benefit societies in Whitney Pier was providing financial and practical assistance in building and maintaining a place for religious worship. The Daughters of Jacob helped to support the Adath Israel Synagogue; the St. Nicholas Italian Church established the St. Rita Society both for its own support and for injured steelworkers; the St. Michael's Polish Benevolent Society was established in 1909 and began building a church almost immediately; as did the Ukrainian organization, the "Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost."

Photo courtesy of the United Church Archives



St. Michael's Benefit Society Hall

Another Ukrainian mutual aid organization was the Ukrainian Workers Benevolent Association which was not religiously oriented in the usual sense, but was part of the Ukrainian Labour Temple Movement, started in Western Canada as a farmer's organization. There were other societies which had religious functions as well as acting as networks which resulted in jobs for members. The Catholic Knights of Columbus sponsored by Holy Redeemer Church, the Protestant Newfoundlanders' Orange Lodge located on the corner of Victoria Road and Furnace Street, the Protestant Society of United Fishermen with a hall on Bay St., whose members carried bibles in their parades. The Universal Negro Improvement Association had branches in the West Indian communities of Whitney Pier, Glace Bay and New Waterford. It was a West Indian/American based organization originally connected with the African Orthodox Church. Its leader, Marcus Garvey, visited Whitney Pier in the 1930's and gave a speech at the Menelik Hall.

The halls built by various benefit societies were tangible symbols of the societies' objectives and activities. The halls were usually rectangular structures large enough to accommodate meetings, dances and weddings, provided many immigrants with an opportunity and place to speak their own language, share and practice their traditional customs, and feel secure and comfortable in the face of their new life. Some of the halls which catered to specific ethnic groups were sometimes owned by individuals, but they still served to provide a focal point for the group's social activities. Some of these are the Croatian Club, the West Indian Cricket Club, and an Italian Club.

Photo courtesy of Whitney Pier Historical Society



The United Fishermen's Band was an example of how benefit groups gained solidarity.

The introduction of government social programs, as well as the formation of a Credit Union in 1934 resulted in changes in the economic support systems for the people of Whitney Pier. So also, the role of the benevolent societies changed. Instead of primarily providing financial assistance, they became more oriented to cultural and social activities. However, economic functions continue: in the past thirty years the benefit organizations have been active in providing scholarships to local students and maintaining refugee funds for modern immigrants.

There remain many benevolent/ benefit societies in Whitney Pier today and each one continues to play an important role in that community.

Clearly, the establishment of those societies in Whitney Pier has much to do with the maintenance of the many rich cultures that make up the community. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton with Evelyn Moraff Davis



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute

1921, Laurier Street. This group paraded in support of a movement advocating "Africa for Africans." The sizable brass band was one of a number in Whitney Pier. Stirring music was an essential component of any march.



A landmark remembered-

A young boy watches the disappearance of a building that meant good times to his father and grandfather - a place of exotic entertainment, an escape from everyday troubles and worries. He might have heard vivid stories from the older generations about how, as young boys, they enjoyed "sneaking" into the matinees through the coal chutes.

Kbatter's movie theatre, The Casino, built on the corner of Victoria Road and Mt. Pleasant Street, opened in 1914 and featured "talkies" in 1929. This photo shows the demolition of the building in 1990. There were other movie theatres at the Pier, including the Gaiety Theatre built about the same time by Starr MacLeod, and later called the Starr Theatre.



E. Beaton Photos



Some of the items salvaged from The Casino included this vintage movie projector - a "dinosaur" of an industry that has moved from cinema houses to video cassettes, VCR's and television sets in the livingroom. There have been no movie theatres for over 30 years at the Pier. ■



The "Turkish" Bath, located on Mt. Pleasant Street, was operated by a Ukrainian.

Life after work: the social ties

Social gatherings formed an important part of Whitney Pier's early commercial life. Recollections of activities around the "bottom" of Lingan Road, near the Coke Ovens, give us a picture of ways in which working people, mainly men, relaxed at the end of their shifts.

Henry Bell, perhaps the only American southern Black to remain in Cape Breton, ran a bar on Curry's Lane in 1910. It is believed that the same location served as a combined bar and brothel in later years under different management.

In 1903, there were three pool rooms on Victoria Road, while in 1918 there were many dispersed throughout the Pier to provide recreation and relaxation for the steel workers and youth of the area. On Lingan Road near Frederick Street, at a privately owned "Hungarian Hall," was an outdoor bowling alley made of concrete. After electricity came to the Pier, night bowling was possible. At two cents per string, the idea was

popular, particularly amongst the Slavic people of the area. Soon, there were two other alleys, one on south Tupper Street which was enclosed and heated for winter enjoyment, and another on Frederick Street, both built and operated by Hungarians.

A commercialized social gathering place was also an essential service to much of the community. It was the "Turkish" Baths, located on Mt. Pleasant Street. Operated by a Ukrainian entrepreneur, it was a favourite relaxation of Jewish businessmen, but it was also a chance for people of Whitney Pier, especially those without indoor plumbing, to get a weekly bath for a nickel.

The Menelik Hall also offered baths, "very hot, something like a sauna" to the community around Tupper and Laurier Streets.

There were at least three private Italian Clubs, the "Young Men's Sporting Club" which had 52 members in its 1930's heyday, and "*Dopa Labor*," meaning "after work." The third was

"Fidelity Hall" located upstairs at Mike Martinello's store on Tupper Street; naturally it was also called "Martinello's Hall." Boxing was promoted here, but there were also dances which included the wider community.

Martinello's Hall was often rented by the Hungarian community as a meeting place and for their annual Harvest Festival, an old world festival associated with grape dancing. The community also used the UNIA Hall for this occasion. The Hungarian Band played, grapes hung around the hall and a wine called "Sleepy Angus" was served.

Even with a relative shortage of women in Whitney Pier, dances were important events. In 1908, there were three major "dance hotels" along Victoria Road -- *The Globe*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Royal Oak* -- and MacMillan's Dance Hotel on St. Ann's Street.

Non-commercial dances took place wherever musicians could be found. The young people knew that the local accordion player was home from the plant when they spied his boots on his doorstep. They would go to his house and persuade him to play a few tunes. Before long they would have a fine party going, with plenty of jigs, reels and polkas keeping them dancing till dark. Then around 9 pm, the musician would stop and send the kids home or else face the wrath of their parents.

The formalization of ethnic groups through their churches and benefit societies -- and the involvement of family groups -- resulted in ethnic or religion-based halls where dances, showers, weddings, and other "organized" events took place.



Beaton Institute photo, gift of E. Moraff-Davis.



Beaton Institute photo, gift of John Markotich

Plays, both of European and local authorship were staged between the 1920's and 1940 by the Ukrainian Labour Temple, first located on Victoria Road at Ferris Street and later on Mt. Pleasant Street. Members recall that participation was guaranteed to anyone who wished to take part, even if the director had to change the original script. The "Ever-Ready" Club sponsored by church groups in the Black community also presented theatrical productions. This may have been the drama group organized by John Armstrong and Bill Harris which performed plays all over Sydney, but particularly at the old UNIA Hall on Tupper Street and at the Menelik Hall after it opened in 1936. There were also plays and "vaudeville" at the Khatter Theatre and at the Imperial Hall, and even earlier at MacLeod's Hall on Victoria Road. Perhaps the first dramatic production in Whitney Pier was *Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed on the banks of "First Brook" in a sort of amphitheatre, in the early 1900's.

Evenings in both summer and winter were filled with music as choral groups such as the "Heart and Hands Circle." A surprising number of bands performed concerts in halls and "fields" and even side walks.

Church picnics, held by the various churches every summer have always been the most prominent means of social exchange. One early example was Holy Redeemer, which held its picnics in Carlin's Field. These not only offered the usual in terms of general booths, but also featured

basketball games between Cape Breton teams and a dancing stage and orchestra. So popular were these events that an extra ferry and extra long train service was provided to take in people from North Sydney and Glace Bay. The Sept. 1, 1904 *Post* reported that the picnic went an afternoon and evening with the grounds being lit in the night by "arc and numerous incandescent lights ... a pretty sight." Another such picnic was sponsored by the St. Nicholas Italian church on August 28, 1909. It took place in the large yard at the rear of the church near the subway where, besides the usual attractions, it featured a boxing exhibition.

The present day social life of Whitney Pier continues to centre around churches or ethnic groups. The annual West Indian Picnic at St. Philip's Church yard offers delicious Caribbean food and Calypso music. In 1990, the Polish and Ukrainian parishes held a Slavic Festival which commenced with a Mass that combined the Eastern and Roman liturgical rites, symbolizing the close historical ties between Slavic peoples of Whitney

Beaton Institute photo, gift of Frank K. Murphy



World War I military band, Victoria Road

Pier. Whether a picnic, or a pirogi sale at the Ukrainian Hall or a Tarbish tournament at the Imperial Hall, or a Tea and Sale at Trinity Church, the participation is almost always wider than the hall or church or ethnic group suggests. ■

-Mary Keating, Elizabeth Beaton



Polish Girls' Choir, St. Mary's Polish Church

Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Ukrainian dancers



A picnic for Hungarian immigrants at South Bar



E. Beaton Photo

88 Mt. Pleasant Street was originally a synagogue for the Jewish community. It is now a museum and a meeting place for the Whitney Pier Historical Society.

The churches of the Pier

DID YOU KNOW?

► Many religious buildings were financed and built by the ethnic groups who, relying mainly on volunteer labour, used the talents and skills of individuals within their specific communities. Members of each ethnic group added distinctive touches from their own traditional art and craftsmanship to build simple but dignified structures. In some instances, the steel company contributed to the building of churches in the Pier.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, almost a score of churches and one synagogue existed in Whitney Pier. The places of ritual and worship

have changed over the years: some buildings served more than one congregation, congregations moved as the need arose, and several original structures were replaced after destruction by fire. There are landmark buildings in the Pier that once housed religious congregations and others that exist only in memory, having been demolished or destroyed by fire. From City Directories, we know of other churches such as the "Coloured Church" on Henry Street and the "Union Coloured Church" on Laurier Street, but their locations are no longer evident. Also, during the 1940's, the Pentecostal Church, affectionately known as the "holy rollers," held services at various locations on Victoria Road.

Today, there are eight active churches in Whitney Pier, three of which have been declared Heritage Properties under the Heritage Act of Nova Scotia.

Adath Israel Congregation

Mt. Pleasant Street

The building that is now *The Whitney Pier Museum* and meeting place for the Whitney Pier Historical Society, was originally the synagogue for the Jewish community of Whitney Pier.

The Synagogue took shape in April, 1913, when members of the Whitney Pier Jewish community met to plan the building of a "Shul" or synagogue. Land was purchased only a few weeks later and the cornerstone of the new synagogue was laid in July of that year. In September, 1913, services for the Jewish High Holidays were held by the *Adath Israel Congregation* in their newly built Synagogue on Mount Pleasant Street. The Young Men's Hebrew Association building, the centre of the community's social life, was located on the lot near the Synagogue.

The Synagogue initially served approximately 60 Jewish families from both Sydney and Whitney Pier. The central European orthodox tradition of their religious life was evident in many features of the building. The *Bimah*, for the reading of the *Torah*, was centrally located; upstairs was a gallery for the women so that they could sit separately during services; the *Mikvab*, or ritual bath was located in the basement. Curiously, the altar was facing South. Other standard elements of design gave the traditional continuity that has been part of the



Jewish faith over the centuries: the *Menorah* and the *Ark of the Covenant*, and the *Eternal Light*. The *Talmud Torah* or Hebrew School was also located in the basement.

The Adath Israel Synagogue was a two story wood frame structure with four large windows on each side which lighted both the main floor and the gallery. Over the main door, at the north end of the building, was a circular window encompassing a Star of David.

The original structure was destroyed by fire in 1960. Immediately, a committee was formed to rebuild, comprised of Ephraim Feder, Hymie Moraff, and Ephraim Newman. The entire Jewish community of Whitney Pier assisted in raising money to build the new Synagogue; the "Daughters of Jacob" Aid Society played a major in this activity. The new Synagogue was built on the previous foundation and the basement remains as it was originally. Even today, the *Mikvab* can still found in its original location. It is a one-story building, basically similar to its predecessor. The design by Norman Weiner has significant changes, first the new altar was facing East in keeping with tradition, and secondly, women sat on the same floor as the men but on a raised level indicated by a decorated rail. The Memorial lights dedicated to deceased members -- symbol of remembrance and continuity -- were presented on a panel along with the Memorial lights of the New Waterford synagogue, closed since 1967.

Many of the original Jewish families of Whitney Pier have moved to other locations within and



Beaton Institute Photo, gift of E. Moraff Davis

outside Sydney. The resulting smaller Jewish population making up the Adath Israel Congregation joined the Sons of Israel Congregation in Sydney in 1985. The Memorial lights were placed in the Sydney synagogue.



**St. Philip's African
Orthodox Church**
Hankard Street.

St. Philip's is the only African Orthodox parish in Canada. It recognizes both the African and West Indian background of its congregation, although it is open to all races. Its present congregation has about 150 families.

The advent of the African Orthodox Church was part of a 20th century world-wide movement for Black racial consciousness. The founding leader of the Church, George Alexander McGuire, had early connections with the Universal Negro Improvement Association headed by Jamaican Marcus Garvey. However, the two institutions have been quite separate since the 1920's. The Apostolic Succession for the Church is through the American Catholic Church.

In 1921, Reverend W. E. Robertson of New York established the African Orthodox Church in Whitney Pier in response to a request from Black steelworkers. After serving the community from a number of locations, the St. Philip's AOC parish purchased land from William Fitzgerald, then Mayor of Sydney. In 1927, a building, owned originally by BESCO, was moved by flatcar and rollers from the plant property to Hankard Street where it

was consecrated. Volunteers from the community -- carpenters and other craftsmen and labourers -- immediately began the reconstruction, adding an inset tower and pointed windows. The new St. Philip's African Orthodox Church was opened on July 12, 1928.

The present steeple and closed bell tower were completed in the 1970's and are much like the originals which were completed in the 1940's. In the interior, one is struck by the dignity with which everyday materials are used in the decoration of the church. The Byzantine Crosses indicate the Orthodox connection, although the vestments and many of the ritual devotions have associations with Roman or Anglican Churches. The community indicates its pride in the history of the church with an exhibition of historical photographs just inside the doorway.

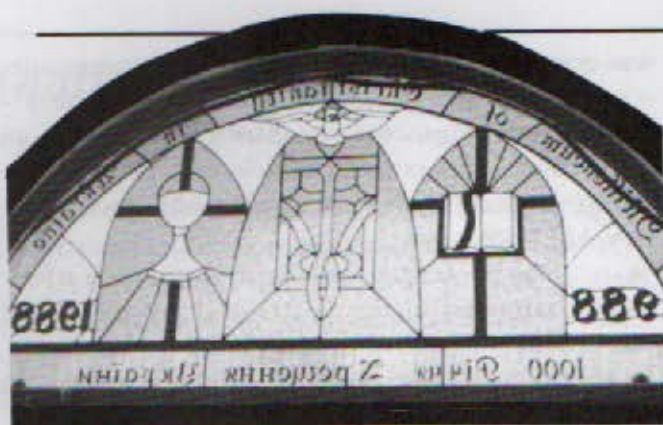
African Methodist Episcopal Church Victoria Road

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, or AME, was a major Black church in the United States and Central Canada, but despite an enthusiastic beginning, it did not become an established church in Whitney Pier.

There are indications that the church attempted to organize in Sydney as early as 1903. A committee headed by the Elder for the Maritimes proposed a building especially for Sunday School for "more than 100 coloured children" in the Pier. Initially the AME used the Italian Mission building for services.

A 1923 newspaper reported on the early efforts of the AME to situate in Sydney: "After considerable looking around, a vacant store at 711 Victoria Road was fitted up temporarily for church purposes." The AME goal was to build a headquarters for religious and social activities for Black Sydney residents so "they would have an opportunity to attain a high level of Christian citizenship and mingle their efforts with those of the entire community in advancing civic and religious interest." The building was to seat 600 people. Less than a month later, DISCO announced a contribution of \$1,000. towards the church and Sunday school building.

However, there is no evidence that the building was ever completed and the AME in Whitney Pier was not sustained.



Artwork by Steven Melnick

Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

West Street

The Holy Ghost Church is the only Ukrainian church in Canada east of Montreal and serves the largest Ukrainian community in the Atlantic area. Holy Ghost Church has a parish of about 130 families of ethnic Ukrainians in Whitney Pier and another 60 families living in the Glace Bay area.

Holy Ghost officially opened in November of 1913 at 49 West Street in the name of Nykyta Budka, the first Ukrainian Catholic Bishop in Canada. The church was the result of initiatives of the Ukrainian Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost and the efforts of the whole community.

The original Holy Ghost "Ruthenian" Greek Catholic Church burned in 1933. By the following year, the parish had completed the present church. The new church is more ornate than the first though it has the same basic shape and stands on the same foundation.

In the predominantly Anglo-Celtic context of Sydney, Holy Ghost Church presents an exotic combination of Romanesque and Byzantine symmetry topped with golden domes which catch the sunlight and can be seen from many surrounding areas. There are assorted windows along with various decorative mouldings and crosses that are indicative of the Byzantine rite. The



Photo courtesy of The Beaton Institute

belfry is located in the church yard, in keeping with the Ukrainian tradition.

The interior of Holy Ghost Church is richly decorated with icons of the Evangelists, and Ukrainian religious heroes such as Saint Vladimir and Saint Olga. The "ikonostas" and wall icons were painted by Theodore Baran of Saskatchewan. The simulated wood-graining of the pews represents the traditional art of the members of the parish. Another example of local artistry is the splendid stained glass in the front door of the church which commemorates the Ukrainian Millennium of Christianity



Photo courtesy of The Beaton Institute



Beaton Institute photo, gift from the Ukrainian Community

St. George's Russian/Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Breton Street

St. George's Church building had a number of congregations, but its religious function ceased over 30 years ago. Situated on top of Breton Street hill, it is a small but distinctive wood frame structure, with a rounded end wall providing the altar space in traditionally shaped Eastern Orthodox churches. It is still known in Whitney Pier as the "round church" or "Russian Church."

The "Russian" church began in 1916, when Alexander Nemolovsky, Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in Canada, visited Nova Scotia. He observed that there were some 500 Russian people living in Sydney. As a result of his trip, Reverend John Tirtichny was sent to Sydney to establish the Russian Orthodox Church in Whitney Pier. St. George's Russian Ukrainian Orthodox Church was built at a cost of \$5000.

In 1923, after only seven years of operation, St George's Church ceased its function, a delayed result of the Russian Revolution. Years later, in 1936, a set of complicated religious, political and financial problems within the Canadian Ukrainian Catholic Church caused the church to re-open. The building was re-named St. George's Ukrainian Orthodox Church. St. George's closed its doors once more in 1952, and it was used for a short time as a Baptist church.

Today it serves as the Whitney Pier Senior Citizens' Club.



E.B. Photo



St. Mary's Polish Church

Wesley Street

In 1909, the St. Michael's Benefit Society began collecting financial contributions toward the building of a church. After extended discussion with the Bishop of the Diocese, the cornerstone for a Polish church was laid in 1913 and members of the Polish community built the church with their own labour. The "Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" was completed in 1918. The glebe house, situated beside the churchsite, was completed a year before. The exterior has a simplified Gothic design with accentuated turrets, and an abundance of quatrefoils in moulded peaked frames. The imposing steeple, spire and cross rise to 65 feet. The beauty of the structure is brought to everyone's attention on special occasions by chimes which ring out Polish melodies across the community.

The interior echoes the Gothic influence of the exterior with high arched ceilings and decorative spans. An exquisite rose glass window graces the altar area, and tall stained-glass windows grace the sloping choir balcony. St. Mary's has retained its plaster statues, its original baptismal stand and its pulpit. The Stations of the Cross, donated by members of the community, are explicated in the Polish language. The side "Mary" altar is decorated with a painting of *The Black Madonna* by Pier artist John Tynski. On special occasions, the church proudly displays the Salt and Bread which was presented to Pope John Paul in 1985. This church is truly unique amongst Latin Rite Churches in the area.

St. Mary's serves the ethnic Polish community as well other Roman Catholics of Slavic descent, such as Croats, who feel comfortable with Polish language and custom. The Parish has about 130 families.



Photos courtesy of The Beaton Institute

Photo courtesy of The Beaton Institute

St. Nicholas Italian Church

Gatacre Street

Early in the twentieth century, Father Domenico Viola was sent from Bari, Italy to succeed Father Johnston in giving spiritual guidance to the immigrant Italian community in Whitney Pier. In 1911, under Viola's leadership, construction began on St. Nicholas Church on William and Hankard Streets. The completed building was an impressive structure of Gothic design with a 65 foot tower and steeple on the north end corner. The wood frame building was shingled and painted grey with two doors on William Street. Initially the church served as the glebe for Fr. Viola and Fr. MacLean who succeeded him. Later, when Fr. D'Intino was parish priest, the glebe was located on Rear Laurier St.

St. Nicholas' altar was "set-out" into the nave, an interior design common in Italian churches. Light from the tall Gothic windows and the cross-shaped window over the entrance accentuated locally hand crafted Stations of the Cross and the many paintings on the interior walls.

The church seated 350 people. Over the years, the congregation extended well beyond the Italian community in Whitney Pier. Many Roman Catholics of Newfoundland and West Indian background, from Ward V, attended the church, as well as parishioners who came from Ashby before St. Teresa's Church was built. Masses were in Latin, but the sermons were in both English and Italian. St. Nicholas was renowned for its excellent choir.



The social life of the Italian community was sustained to a great extent by St. Nicholas Parish. People remember spending Sunday afternoons in the yard behind the church at picnics, dancing or playing *boche* ball. St. Rita Italian Hall was eventually built on Hankard St. behind the church. It is now a community centre for the area.

In 1975 St. Nicholas Church burned to the ground. Within a year it was replaced by a Cultural Centre on Gatacre Street where Mass is held for the Italian community every Sunday. The Centre is a simple cement and steel structure with an inset movable altar. The present St. Nicholas congregation numbers about 100 families and is served by clergy from Holy Redeemer Parish.



E. Beaton Photo



Beaton Institute, gift of the Salvation Army, Whitney Pier

Salvation Army

Church Street

On May 22, 1902, less than a score of years after the founding of the first Salvation Army Unit in Canada, the Salvation Army came to Sydney. In 1905, a Citadel was built on Victoria Road next to the present Whitney Credit Union.

The original Salvation Army building was a two-story wooden structure. While many activities of the church took place in the Senior Chapel, the ministry

also took place in the full view of the community. Until the 1950's, it was a common sight on Sunday evenings to see over a hundred people gathered at the Corner of Henry Street and Victoria Road listening to the Salvation Army Band. In 1970, the Salvation Army moved to Church Street where they continue today. The new building has a chapel, a Youth Corps hall and rooms for Sunday school classes. Services were held there for the first time in 1971 under the ministry of Major Fred Goobie. The Salvation Army band and choir, with their "open airs," continue to be a familiar and welcome sight in Whitney Pier. The congregation numbers about 150 families.

As in numerous other towns and cities in the western world, the Salvation Army aids in disasters, runs a "thrift" shop and has a "tavern ministry." Their work in the community is highly respected by all denominations.



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

Holy Redeemer Roman Catholic Church

Victoria Road at Church Street

In 1902, Holy Redeemer Catholic Church was erected on land donated by James Carlin, a Whitney Pier resident. The church was initially under the ministry of Father Neil MacDonald who served the parish until 1906. Before he died in 1907, Father MacDonald established a school in the church basement, supervised the building of a glebe house and undertook the construction of a convent/school and a parish hall.

The original Holy Redeemer Church was a Neo-Classic structure which was designed by architect Ronald Gillis. The wood frame building featured an 82' steeple and spire on the southeast corner. The bell was cast by Manely Bell Company of New York and weighed 3,000 lbs. Standing 4 1/2 feet high, the bell was cast to strike

Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

on the key of "F." Built on a stone foundation, the church had arched and circular windows and a gallery on both sides.

After the church burned in 1913, it was reconstructed of wood masonry with a roofed steeple and a copper-finished spire. The windows are of stained-glass and the interior speaks of modified Tudor Gothic design in douglas fir. The interior of the Holy Redeemer features hewed pews, and sixteen layers of double arches, as well as a bronzed holy water font crafted in Italian marble. Holy Redeemer seats 1,000 and serves a parish of some 800 families.

The original Holy Redeemer Church served the community for only nine years. In 1913, a fire began just below the roof line of the church and spread, destroying Holy Redeemer and 30 other buildings. For the next six years, the parishioners used the Imperial Hall for services until the new church was built in 1919.



St. Alban's Anglican Church

St. Alban's Avenue

At the turn of the 20th century, St. Alban's was a "hall" which served as a mission of St. George's in Sydney. However, by 1901, the Archdeacon and his congregation expressed concern about finding a site for a new church. In May 1902, at a congregational meeting at the Mission Hall, plans and specifications for the new church were ready and studied in August. A famous Prince Edward Island native, W. Critchlow Harris was the architect of the new church.

Three months later a contract was awarded to Alex Cameron to build St. Alban's Church at a price of \$4,725. The cornerstone was laid in 1902 during an open-air service by Frederick Courtney, Lord Bishop of Nova Scotia. The church building was completed by 1904, but it was not until 1905 that it received a baptismal font, the symbol of the Christian Church. Pews were used for the first time in 1919. The Church was consecrated in 1924 by Archbishop W.W. Worrell.

St. Alban's Anglican Church is a wood-frame building with a gabled roof and a prominent tower. A stained-glass window is situated above the altar made up of three panels: the first depicts St. Paul, the centre panel entitled "*Light of the World*," shows Christ knocking on the door, the third is of St. Alban. The interior displays the remarkable

woodwork characteristic of early 20th century Protestant churches.

St. Alban's has had two parish Halls in its history. In 1931 the congregation converted St. Cyprian's Mission on Henry Street into their parish hall after the building had been struck by fire. But the parish sold the building in 1941 and began their search for a new location that would be



E.Beaton Photo



E.Beaton Photo

closer to the church. In 1946, after unsuccessfully looking for a church hall, the decision was made to build.

The church served many old Sydney families as well as many Newfoundlanders and West Indian immigrants. The congregation now has 170 members.



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton. Interior view by Duncan Mackay.

Trinity United Church

Victoria Road at Matilda Street

The parish of Trinity Church was created by three distinctive congregations, the union of St. James and St. Mark (both Presbyterian) in 1919, and Victoria (Methodist) United in 1937. Trinity United Church is the second church to be built on this location. The first church was St. James Presbyterian which was built in 1900 and was destroyed by fire in 1906. A second St. James Church was rebuilt by M.R. Chappell Ltd. of Sydney, and was dedicated in 1907.

The 1937 union of the three churches resulting in Trinity Church was a success. It

joined Scottish Presbyterians from Victoria County with Methodists whose roots were in Newfoundland, as well as smaller numbers from other ethnic groups, including Hungarian and West Indian.

Trinity United is one of the more elaborate architectural features of Whitney Pier. The building, designed and constructed by Chappell's, is built of wood and one of its features is an inset corner tower with a steeple situated between two gabled ends giving a hexagon effect. The interior is warm with wood tones which reflect light from its Gothic windows. The seating is circular and graded slightly like an amphitheatre, with attention focusing on the pulpit, from which the pastor speaks to its 300 families.



courtesy of The Beaton Institute

Victoria Methodist Church

Victoria Road and Wesley Street

The Victoria Methodist Church, one of the major components of the United Church in Whitney Pier, is no longer active. Nor is its building standing, having been demolished soon after the Methodist congregation joined Trinity Church in 1937.

Victoria Methodist began as a Mission of the Sydney Jubilee Methodist Church in 1901 when a large wood-frame structure was erected on Victoria Road -- the site of the current Pier Legion. In 1925

the Mission became Victoria United Church, although it continued to be known as "Victoria Methodist" Church. The building had a high gable roof with a centrally placed cupola. The high and wide pitch of the roof, combined with two levels of windows and contrasting upper and lower sheathing, was reminiscent of early New England styles.

The congregation included many Newfoundlanders and West Indians, and other Anglo-Celtic immigrants and migrants from various parts of Nova Scotia, including Nova Scotia Blacks.

The Social Gospel

Many churches and missions in Whitney Pier were part of the Canadian Social Gospel, a program of Christian response to the social changes which resulted from industrialization and immigration. Initiated by Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, one of the basic aims of the Social Gospel was to assist immigrants in their adjustment to Canadian life. For some cases, this meant an attempt to assimilate immigrants and to instill in them a feeling of nationalism which would assure their active participation in Canadian life. The Social Gospel also tried to consider the spiritual and physical needs of urban industrial people, both immigrant and Canadian-born. It was a program of responsibility which was not individualistic, but inclusive. The Social Gospel sponsored action for improved housing and working conditions, for education, for health services, and on occasion was involved in the labour movement.



United Mission

Lingan Road

The United Mission is an imposing three-story wood-frame structure with a gabled roof. Today, it provides space for a daycare and community centre, and its activities are supervised by members of the Black community of Whitney Pier. It began as part of the Social Gospel of the Pier.

From 1912 to 1918, it was called the Italian Mission (Protestant) before it came under the joint sponsorship of the Presbyterian and Methodist Missionary Societies. In 1925, the Italian Mission was included in formation of the United Church of

Canada, from which time it became known as the United Mission. Serving many immigrants who resided near the steel plant, the Mission performed various functions -- church services, marriage ceremonies and baptisms -- and played a vital role in several ethnic communities. On a social level, the Mission provided health clinics and social welfare during the difficult years of the Depression and during times when steel plant workers were striking. The Mission also provided language training for new immigrants to the area.

Its work was administered by the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and later by the United Church of Canada. Since 1937, the United Mission has been the local responsibility of Trinity United Church.



E. Beaton Photo

St. Stephen's Hungarian Church

Tupper Street and Lingan Road

Long since disappeared except for oral history and a 1914 City Directory reference to a "Hungarian" church at 176 Tupper Street, St. Stephen's Church might also be considered as part of the Social Gospel. The Minister for St. Stephen's was a Presbyterian Missionary, Reverend M.A.C. Kinsale, who spoke Hungarian and reputedly came to Cape Breton from Montreal and the United States. He had

a great deal of sympathy for the economic and living conditions of the European immigrants and he wrote frequently on this topic in Presbyterian publications. But this visible concern seems to have branded him a sympathizer with the enemy during World War I, and there was talk of his deportation in 1915.

The building which housed St. Stephen's was a wood-frame structure with a gable roof and pointed windows. One former parishioner recalls sitting as a child in chairs at the front of the church while the adults used regular pews. The church probably ceased its functions with the loss of its pastor during WWI. The building later was used as the UNIA Hall and was demolished in the 1940's.

Early Congregations

corner of Fisher and Henry Streets

On the corner of Fisher and Henry Streets is a large wood-frame rectangular building with a smaller front section, and interior features suggestive of religious function. Indeed, it has housed several congregations, including St. Mark's Presbyterian Mission, St. Cyprian's Anglican Mission and the African Orthodox Church. It is a familiar landmark known for being a CCF Hall in the 1950's, a boxing ring, and for many years as Wapo's Dairy, and it now functions as an apartment building.

From 1901 to 1919, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church was a mission of the Falmouth Presbyterian Church of Sydney. Oriented toward the goals of the Social Gospel, the mission was initially intended to serve the rural Cape Breton people of Scottish descent who moved to that area of Sydney to work at the steel plant. But that purpose was never firmly established "due to the many nationalities crowding into the community." The mission ceased

its functions in 1919 when it joined with St. James Church on Victoria Road.

Also in the 1920's, the "coloured" people of St. Alban's Anglican parish used the building on Henry Street as a mission for services. In 1925, at an afternoon service, the Mission was dedicated to the Archbishop and named St. Cyprian's Mission. C.S. England, formerly associated with the A.M.E., was ordained Deacon at the Mission in the same year. It continued as a mission of St. Alban's until 1932, when a fire struck and made it unserviceable as a church. St. Alban's then took over the Mission and used it as a parish hall until 1941.

At that point, the congregation then split, some parishioners turning to the Victoria Methodist Church and some staying with St. Alban's. The majority, however, eventually switched to the African Orthodox Church.

The African Orthodox Church also used the building in the early 1920's before St. Philip's Church was completed on Hankard Street. ■

-Elizabeth Beaton



E.Beaton Photo



Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society

Whitney Pier Schools

Tradition is all we have to tell us of the first school in Whitney Pier. It existed in the 1890's and was a one-room building on the corner of the Shore Road and Broadway. This was followed by the "Creek School" started on the corner of Victoria Road and Henry Street, where the Royal Bank now stands. In 1897, it had one teacher, Miss K. Muggah, and 29 students were registered there. Many of the Creek School's students were from "the county."

From its early years until the 1960's, education in Whitney Pier was characterized by a constant struggle for adequate space. Even in 1900 there were 200 school children in Whitney Pier, and by 1903, the school population had jumped to 738 pupils, as thousands of skilled workers and

their families poured into the area. The Compulsory Schools Act of 1907 made the situation worse, compelling all children 8 - 16 to attend school. Rented classrooms and the basement of the Methodist Church on Victoria Road were used for overflow classes during this period. The School Commissioner at the time noted that the numbers would be higher still "were it not that so many boys and girls have to work." By 1910, four schools had opened in Whitney Pier; all had expanded soon after their original construction. It was not unusual for one teacher to have 100 pupils in those years of Whitney Pier's heady expansion.

High as enrolments were, school attendance in this industrial community was actually

Eastmount School was first designated for immigrant children by the Sydney school board in 1902 and was called the "Cokovia School." It was also referred to as the "Coke Ovens School" or the "Lingan Road School." The first enrolment gave it 32 students and one teacher. By 1904, it became Eastmount School, a three story building which was later torn down and replaced by a one story structure.



Photos courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society



E Beaton Photo

inconsistent. Before 1950, it was unusual for either boys or girls to complete high school, as their contribution to the family income took priority over school attendance. Statistics show that school attendance dwindled as age increased. In 1915 in Eastmount School, there were 108 students in grade one and only 18 in grade five; at Holy Redeemer, there were 217 in grade one and 25 in grade five. There still fewer students in the higher grades. Even the Compulsory Schools Act did not send everyone to school. A "Truancy Office" was located at Whitney School and court records show that truant pupils and their parents were often up before the magistrate to explain absence from school. Logically, school attendance increased during the Depression for there were fewer jobs, even for adult workers. The Second World War resulted in large numbers of pupils because of the great influx of workers to Whitney Pier to work at the steel plant. Possibly, high wages and more secure jobs for adults during that period resulted in better attendance of children at school. Yet, the older students were issued permits to work to help ease the labour shortage caused by the war.

School attendance was, until about 1950, based on religion. Protestant students attended Eastmount for the elementary grades and Whitney for junior high. Elementary Catholic students went to Villanova in Ward V and Don Bosco in Ward VI; boys went to junior high at Holy Redeemer Boys School; girls were able to take both junior and senior high (to grade 11) at Holy Redeemer Girls School. Completion of high school was in Sydney. Jewish students attended Whitney School and then went on to Sydney Academy.

The late 40's and the 50's marked a transitional period for education in the Pier. Even at that time, many students came to school speaking languages other than English. There was almost full attendance, a result of the family allowance, the financial security brought by the war-time economy, and the realization of the importance of education. "Turning the page of the register" was a common, and sometimes fearful experience for teachers in Whitney Pier, for it meant more than 40 students in the class, all of the subjects taught by the one teacher. Yet, one Whitney Pier teacher remembers her disappointment when some of her 52 students were sent to other classes to ease the overcrowding. By 1959, the Pier boasted six large

schools, primary to high school, with up-to-date facilities and some 2,400 students.

Over the years, the quality of education in Whitney Pier has continually improved. It did not start well: a school report of 1907 complained both of a lack of sanitary facilities and of an almost complete lack of books. However, there was "manual training" in Whitney School as early as 1911. By the 40's there was no shortage of government-supplied text books and there were four excellent libraries in Whitney Pier schools. Stenography was very popular with the female students, at both Whitney School and Holy Redeemer Girls' School. At Holy Redeemer, many of the typewriters were provided by the parish.

Throughout the years, music has played an important role in Whitney Pier school activities. The introduction of a central music program in the 1940's, taught by Ms. Allison, resulted in cooperative productions, such as the *Rumpelstiltskin Opera* in 1952, with elaborate costuming and arrangements. While these productions occurred only every second year and did not continue for long because of the amount of work necessary, they were quite spectacular and of keen interest to the community. Pier schools also took part in Radio Carol Broadcasts, and later in television music broadcasts. And every school had classes entered in that special yearly event, the Music and Speech Festival, where they competed against each other and against the "city" schools of Sydney.

Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute





First Holy Redeemer Convent

James St. 1903-1913

Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society



Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society

Holy Redeemer School

Holy Redeemer was a private school under the charge of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in 1902. It burnt in the famous fire of 1913 but was immediately rebuilt.

Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society

In 1930, Holy Redeemer Parish built Holy Redeemer Boys School, keeping its separate girls school. (with over-flow at the Imperial Hall for the 1940's and 1950's). The Girls School taught grades 11 and 12. In 1961 Holy Redeemer came under the public school system. It ceased to operate in 1965.



Imperial Hall



Whitney Pier Historical Society photo



E. Beaton Photo



Whitney Pier Historical Society photo



E. Beaton Photo

Top left: In 1900 the original Whitney School was built where the present fire station is situated on Victoria Road. It had four rooms, filled to over-flowing with 300 pupils in 1901. On January 14, 1911, the new Whitney School, built of brick, was opened just across the street. It was rebuilt in 1936 and was torn down in 1988. **Bottom left:** Villa Nova School was open to students in 1921 and was run by the Sisters of Notre Dame. It was originally called the "Subway School" and had four departments or classes with a first year attendance of 298. Villa Nova was later torn down. **Top right:** Don Bosco Jr. High opened its doors in 1953, and taught both boys and girls. It is now used as an elementary school. **Middle right:** Memorial Junior High, a large modern complex built in 1977 replaced the aging and out of date facilities of Don Bosco and the Whitney School Jr. High in 1977. **Bottom right:** Elmwood School with Elizabeth Beaton visiting some of the elementary students of Ward V.



Photo by students of Elmwood School

Examination time presented another important occasion. Some residents of Whitney Pier may recall that parents and observers were invited to attend as students went through an oral examination which included recitations of set pieces, choral work and the answering of questions on various subjects. Handiwork of various kinds was also set out for display. When Provincial examinations came in, the attention of high school teachers was almost totally directed to ensuring that their students passed.

Because of the limitations of facilities, school sports were rather informal until the 1960's. But there were hockey and soccer teams using rinks and fields all around the Pier, and the teachers spent many hours and gallons of gas carrying students all around Cape Breton County to play basketball.

The 1960's established the patterns we now see in the education of Whitney Pier. Out-migration and smaller families completely reversed previous enrolment trends, and fewer pupils and school closures became the topic of annual school board reports. Centralized education eliminated high school in the Pier, and now there is one large and very modern, departmentalized, junior high school. Separation of children on religious lines has become a tradition of the past. The 60's also marked the advent of male participation in teaching, and firmly established post-secondary opportunities outside the community which incredibly broadened career possibilities for Whitney Pier children. ■

-Mary Keating, Elizabeth Beaton

Beaton Institute, Owen Fitzgerald photo



Along with the formal school system, many ethnic communities conducted classes in religion, language, crafts and the performing arts. These classes were taught by community members or by guests brought in by the community especially to help maintain the customs of the Old Country, or the traditional religion.

E. Beaton Photo





E.Beaton Photo

When walking down the streets of Whitney Pier today, it is easy to imagine the kind of bustling activity that must have been part of the daily life of the Whitney Pier of the early 1900's when the steel plant was starting up and its busy harbour piers were constantly shipping coal or receiving goods.

Before 1908, there was a substantial business district along the Shore Road, Broadway, Dominion Street and the adjoining section of Victoria Road. Recorded in 1903, not only were there a number of sea captains who were also general merchants, but also there were many boarding houses and other services for one of the most lively areas of Sydney. The area had blacksmiths, shoemakers, bakeries, and the offices of Cape Breton Electric which ran the tram line throughout the industrial area. Newfoundlanders and native Cape Bretoners with names like Ryan, Squires, Pyke, MacLeod, Campbell, MacInnis, Callahan and Murphy ran clothing stores, confectionaries, fruit stores, or were butchers or



Beaton Institute, gift of E.Moraff-Davis

Pier Entreprises



Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society

Victoria Road Then & Now

A feature of the Victoria Road streetscape is that one side of the street is residential, and the opposite side is commercial.

Whitney Pier's business area has distinctive architecture even yet. Many establishments have "boom town" false fronts and some are distinguished by corner doorways. A number of residences throughout the Pier display both these features, reminiscent of their early business functions. But Victoria Road's most curious architectural feature is probably unique -- the corners of many business buildings are not squared! Instead they conform to the pronounced angle at which the streets cross.



Elizabeth Beaton photo

Victoria Road, Whitney Pier, Sydney, N.S.

courtesy of The Beaton Institute





The Jewish people who came to the Pier were entrepreneurial in spirit, and soon established themselves in the business community. Among other ventures, they set up peddling routes from industrial Cape Breton.

dealers of "temperate drink." Reuben Philip on Victoria Road near Dominion Street was a carriage builder and blacksmith.

Then because of the large increase of population in what is now Ward V, the business district became more and more centred toward the Subway along Victoria Road, and reached west toward Langan Road. If, in 1910, you were to walk down Victoria Road from what was MacQuarrie's Crossing, you would find that the Cape Breton and Newfoundland business names were mixed with ones like Rosenbloom, Lubchansky, Nathanson, Hamsin, Best, Sam Lee, and Keller. Along Victoria Road there were photography shops, three drugstores, livery stables, laundries and restaurants, but mainly there were stores for the very basic necessities for a burgeoning working class population -- groceries, shoes and boots, clothing and hardware.

Almost coincidentally, the Langan Road area by the coke ovens was expanding as well. A French shoemaker named Rene Burel worked on the corner of Frederick and Langan, just down from A. G. Libby's big general store; Manchevsky the blacksmith could be reached from Tupper St. Lane; on Buckley's lane was Goldwin's store; Albert

Moore operated his barbershop from his home on Curry's Lane; a little way up Langan Road was Gallivan's store between the Mendelbaum's and Eli Hirsch. A few years later, a Matthew Paul opened a pop factory on Buckley's Lane. It was called the Atlantic Bottling Works where he made "no-name" pop and Java Cola. Occasionally when he had problems getting cheap bottles, he simply used beer bottles. Another manufacturing venture on



Beaton Institute photo, gift of Bernie Kokowska



Whitney Pier Historical Society photo

The Stores Then & Now

Shopping for groceries was a daily task before refrigeration was common. The earlier stores provided the basic necessities for ethnic groups as well as a social climate that fostered many friendships.

Now the stores can offer far more than the basics and they remain friendly, cheery places. Even with the different pace of modern life, there is still time for grocery store visiting. However, daily trips for groceries are no longer necessary.



Elizabeth Beaton photo

the Lingan Road area was the production of Buckley's Mixture for colds. At the corner of Henry Street and Lingan Road, Hirsch's farm became Hirsch's Dairy and later Modern City Dairy which used milk from farms all over eastern Nova Scotia to supply the Industrial area of Cape Breton. Along the streets between Lingan Road and Victoria Road were a vast variety of commercial establishments: West Indians were represented in Carter's Book Store, Crawford's Jewellery Store, Best's Tailoring, Parris' Shoemaking and Campbell's Bakery. Other bakeries included one owned by a Spaniard named Galtajclenia; the Oriental Bakery on Tupper Street was run by Felice DiPenta. There were also Delvechio's Bakery which was to become Bernie Kokowska's Bakery, Martinello's Bakery, and Burns Bakery which was owned by a man named Sappatalonia. Between 1903 and 1923, there ten Chinese laundries and two Chinese restaurants. Most of these were on Victoria Road, but they also carried out their service trades on Lingan Road and Laurier Street. Lebanese families -- Abbass, Ferris, Gentiele, and Joseph -- ran groceries and barber shops. And that was just a taste of the variety of business experience of the early Pier.

The diversity of the commercial establishments reflected the ethnic populations of the area, but also helped to turn the Pier into a cohesive unit. While each of the ethnic groups tended to congregate in a particular area or neighbourhood, the frequent shopping made necessary by no refrigeration probably helped the spread of influences and friendship. One Acadian woman, married to a Newfoundlander would vary



E. Beaton Photo



E. Beaton Photo



E. Beaton Photo



E. Beaton Photo

her family's diet by cooking French *fricot* on one day, Hungarian goulash on another, and herring and potatoes on many a Friday. On special occasions she might make *pirogi*, small pastry turnovers with meat, cheese, and vegetable combinations. In her daily visits to the various shops in the area, she traded recipes and gossip with other shoppers or the shopkeepers, many of whom were women.

Over the Pier's history, its busy commercial centres have changed with the fortunes of the coal and steel industries, Depressions and World Wars, the advent of cars and the lack of city services. Now Whitney Pier businesses are slower-paced and run by long-standing Jewish and other families, almost exclusively on Victoria Road. Fast foods and video stores take the Pier into the modern era; but the jewellery store, ship supply, furniture, clothing and hardware stores, the yarns and crafts shop, bakeries and the grocery stores remind us of the past. A drug store, print shop, gas stations, plumbing and heating, autobody work, hairdressing and barbering, convenience stores, and doctors and lawyers give the Pier some of the commercial self-sufficiency of a previous time. But the magic of the old, bustling Victoria Road lingers on bright, sunny days at the beginning of summer when the sidewalks suddenly become crowded as shoppers, shopkeepers and just "people" stroll together, enjoying the company and the changing season. ■

-Mary Keating, Elizabeth Beaton



E. Beaton Photo



E. Beaton Photo

The Arts



The visual arts of Whitney Pier are the interpretations of experience shaped by the history of this community. With its recurring themes of ethnicity, there are echoes here of the old world transformed in memory, and of passages into a new and unique way of life that is the Pier. The artists choose what is significant to them, things that are both intensely personal and universal. We see the importance of church and of work: the sublime and the everyday. We see that both are loved.

We see the forms and faces of people familiar, yet bespeaking heritages of which we do not know nearly enough. We see the careful, tender drawings of buildings that are part of the mental and well as the physical landscape. In the visual feast of Whitney Pier arts, of which this is but a tiny sampling, we glimpse the soul of this place and its people.

Top: a selection of paintings by Jack Yaroslavaki. Right: ceiling painting by Alfred Goduto.





Upper left: From the sketches of Ron Evely. Upper and bottom right, sketches by M. Hartigan. Middle left and bottom: paintings by Austin Gallivan.



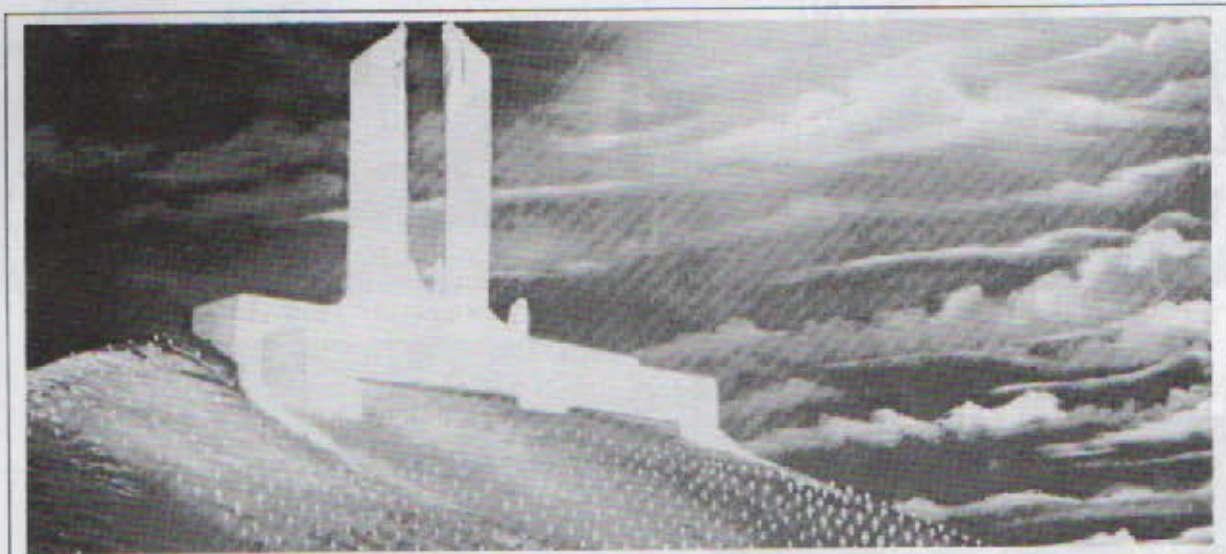


Bill Daye photos courtesy of *Cape Breton's Magazine* taken from U.C.C.B Gallery Collection



Top: City Water Sprinkler, and Ice Wagon, paintings by Bill Daye. Left: wall hanging by Michael J. Smith. Middle: self portrait by Alfred Goduto. (Note the band-painted walls.) Bottom right: Ukrainian Girl, painting by Bill Kenderksi.





Mural painting in Pier Legion by Keith Baldwin



Mural painting by Charles Dawe at James Street Portables

*"Yard Art"
on
Ferris
Street
by
Joseph
Whalen*

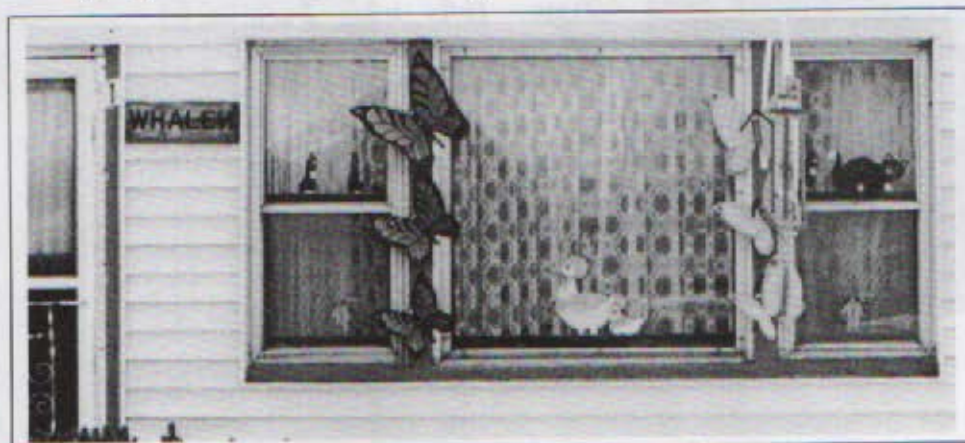




Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

Sports in Whitney Pier has always held an important place in everyday life. Throughout the history of the community, men and women of all ethnic groups took part, whether it was boxing, skating, basketball, or cricket. Sports acted to integrate the people of Whitney Pier, crossing ethnic and religious barriers. Today's most popular games are softball, soccer and hockey, and they keep the sports facilities in the Pier in constant use -- Dominion Field, the Pier Rink, Neville Field, and the Jonathan Skeete Memorial Field.

Sports



Abbass photo, courtesy of the Beaton Institute.



1982 Raytel photo

The Rink

One of the busy places of Whitney Pier is its rink, a place which came into being as a result of determined community action. In the fall of 1968, the Pier Community Forum decided to erect a steel building, 220' x 120', at a cost of over \$100,000. - a huge fund-raising responsibility for the community. The faith was strong, however, and numerous service organizations, schools, businesses, churches, medical people, and government agencies responded to requests for help by rallying to the cause. In 1969, the foundation was poured, and work parties were arranged for almost every day with hundreds of volunteer hours gladly given. The rental of rink hours subsequently enabled the Board of Directors to break even financially, after paying for repairs, maintenance, and the salaries of managers and other staff. The donation of many volunteer hours on behalf of this community service continues to this day.

-Duncan Mackay

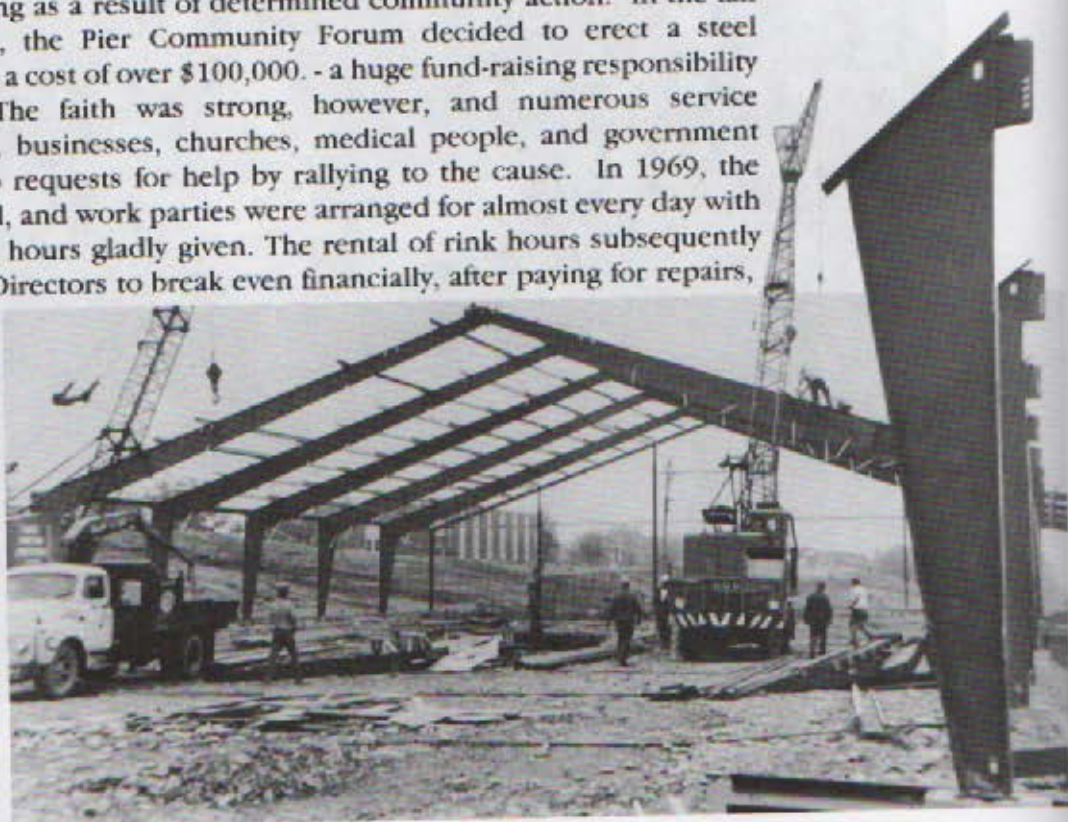


Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Photos courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society





Abbass photo, courtesy of the Beaton Institute



Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society



Photo courtesy of the Beaton Institute, gift of Deborah Jeans



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton



Photo courtesy of the Whitney Pier Historical Society



Photo by Elizabeth Beaton

The Generations . . .

Photo courtesy of the United Church Archives



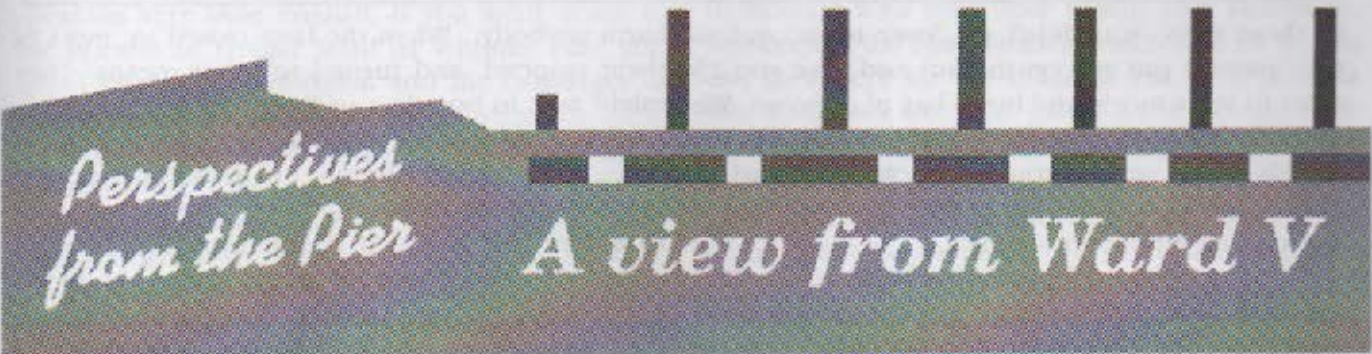
Photo by Elizabeth Beaton



Abbass photo, courtesy of the Beaton Institute



E.Beaton Photo



Perspectives from the Pier

A view from Ward V

by Ron DiPenta

In the coke ovens area where I lived, there was a large number of Italian people. They lived in an area from Victoria Road down to Lingan Road and across as far as Muggah Street. A few lived on nearby streets, but not many. The Italians who came and stayed together in Whitney Pier had common family ties from Italy. In the case of the DiPentas, there are about five related families who came here. If one person was working, then he could sponsor a relative to come as well.

My family was living in a house near where the Overpass is now, the first lot on right hand side. The house is no longer there. The area used to be called "Tin Pan Alley." It was the center of my world and extended to where St. Michael's Hall and the ballfield are now.

In 1941, my happy childhood was interrupted. I think part of the reason why my father left the Pier was that my family found it hard being suspected of sympathizing with Mussolini simply because we were Italian. I remember how I suddenly became self-conscious about being Italian. Canada became involved in fighting Mussolini. Then if you were considered Italian, even if you were born in Whitney Pier, it went rough for you. I was called a Fascist, a Mussolini, but I didn't understand anything about what all of that meant. The kids who were being cruel didn't understand what it meant either. Eventually that all passed after the war, but it left scars in people's minds.

My family left the Pier in 1942 when I was eight, but I never left the Pier, not in my own mind. I will always belong to it. I love it.

The stores

Starting from Mike Campbell's store on the top of Lingan Road to the bottom where you entered the Coke Ovens, the stores were all ethnic. Each one had its own look and smell because they were servicing a whole mosaic of ethnic groups in the nearby community. One store might cater to the Poles and Ukrainians, another to the Chinese people, another to the Anglo-Saxons.

Sam Green's Store was a famous spot where the men who didn't have a shift at the steel plant that day, or who managed to sneak away from work a couple of hours, played cards. The kids would try to look inside from a back window to see what was going on. It was quite an education, the kind you don't get in books. The kids haunted the place because the winners who came out might give the kids each a nickel for an ice cream or a candy over at Mrs. Gaums' store. The bad losers might tell you to get out of the way and help you along with a kick. A good loser left you alone.

My Uncle Joe Dipenta "Blind Man Joe" had a store. He was blind, but you couldn't fool him about money. He knew the denomination of a bill, no matter what it was, and would give you the right change. I could never understand how he did it. He also ran the canteen at the steel plant for many years. Uncle Joe would give me a penny candy and I'd sit on the front steps and chew on that. There was another store across the street with a back window on Lingan Road. When other kids came around, we'd run in back of this other store, which was a meat shop. We'd pry up the window, reach in and grab a hunk of Polish sausage or Kielbasa, close the window and hide behind Uncle Joe's to eat it.

We would also sneak across to "over town," to Sydney, to see what was going on over there.

In those days, you didn't go "over town" unless your parents put you on the bus and gave you 25 cents to see a movie and buy a bag of popcorn. We had to come back immediately afterward. But my friends and I went through the old brickyard to look around Charlotte Street with big eyes. It was like visiting a different country.

I remember the Jewish people of the Pier with special fondness because of their kindness to everybody. There were a quite a few of them at one time, running stores-- they were good, hardworking people with a great belief in education. They were in the Pier about forty or fifty years I believe. Many of their sons and daughters became professionals - doctors, lawyers, dentists. They went away to get educated and, with the exception of a very few, they never returned to the Pier. That is a great sadness to me about the Pier. Our historical society now is housed in the old Synagogue which had to be closed because there were not twelve Jewish people to attend services.

The corner bootleggers

There were no taverns in Ward VI. I asked the man who was to become mayor of Sydney one time why this was, and he said that Ward VI had voted no to drinking places several times. You would think that nobody in Ward VI drank. Well, it has been a standing joke for years. Everybody in Ward VI that drank, went to Ward V to do it. There were two or three taverns, and maybe two dozen bootlegger joints where you could get a drink at any hour of the day or night.

The bootleggers were good people. Bootlegging was the same kind of enterprise as running a corner store to augment the wages of the man of the house. If you had six or seven kids to support, and earned only forty five or sixty cents an hour at the plant, that wasn't very much money. There were school expenses and there was no medicare in those days.

I knew, like every other kid, that the first house on the corner was the place where the men came to buy liquor. The man who lived in the corner house, most often could be found two doors away at another bootlegger's house. My impression was that everybody wanted to go somewhere else to drink.

There were many fine families in Whitney Pier who sold a little drop here and there, not to

harm anybody. When the laws closed in, most of them stopped, and turned to other means. They might take in boarders or have a bigger vegetable garden to take in the extra money.

The Italian Church, St. Nicholas, was one place where the division of the wards didn't seem to matter quite as much. People from all over went to Mass and took part in social gatherings there. There was a big yard in back that was fenced, but this fence kept people together. Saturday and Sunday afternoons, you could find people from all over the Pier, and from Sydney. The women enjoyed the socializing, and the men too, including those who managed to enjoy a sly snort with old cronies. The kids enjoyed it the most. But the rest of the time, the separating fences went back up.

Crossing the fences

Everything at Ward V stopped at Jamieson Street. It was near Holy Redeemer Church. I had always gone to St. Nicholas Church, and I did not know there was another Catholic Church a mile and a half down the street called Holy Redeemer. It might as well have been in Hong Kong for all the kids in my neighbourhood knew of it. We never were allowed beyond Sam Green's place; beyond it was limbo, the edge of the earth. If we ventured, we got a licking when we got home. The feeling was that Ward VI was a kingdom all its own because they were all the same colour. It was, I suppose, the same idea as a Catholic crossing the street instead of passing directly in front of a Protestant Church, a custom in Sydney in the 40's. It was an invisible fence, but no less real and solid.

For a long time I did not know that Ward V was a world apart from Ward VI. When I began to trespass into Ward VI, I discovered most people there were Anglo-Saxon Protestants or Catholics. Many Newfoundlanders lived there, people from the Scottish Highlands, from rural Cape Breton areas.

In Ward V, there were different colours of people, many languages, customs, and religions. My father understood six or seven languages, because he grew up hearing them. My parents and grandmother spoke Italian at home and I understood what they were saying, but I answered them in English. The older people spoke their own languages, and many of them ended their days

speaking very little English. If you went down to the bottom of Lingan Road in Whitney Pier, you heard Ukrainian and Polish and the languages of the Blacks. Somehow they didn't have any trouble communicating. The mannerisms, the body language, the hands and the eyes, are just as important as words. These show respect and whether or not you like the person you speak to. When I was a youngster, for instance, I didn't have any trouble understanding a Ukrainian neighbour who told me to get the hell out of his yard. I knew exactly what he meant.

I did explore over the years, though. All the kids eventually climbed over the fences in the wards in one way or another.

When I was fourteen, I decided to test the feminine grounds of Ward VI. My friends and I attended dances. Young men and the young women started to socialize together from both wards. They started to cross the fences, go to each other's homes, play sports together -- Ward V and Ward VI no longer were separate except geographically and politically. The young people changed that, not the older people. The older people still kept themselves segregated. When a Polish girl was getting married, there was a shower dance, and all kinds of people would come, the French and Irish Newfoundlanders, the Italians, -- anybody who knew the couple. For some reason, a few years after the war, they stopped having these dances.

The gates

The gates at the steel plant were similar to the wards in some respects. They were one of the ways that people sorted themselves in the social system. They used gates because they were comfortable with the group using them, and not just for geographic convenience. Ward VI on the bottom of Dominion Street was the entry point for people from Newfoundland, Scotland, Wales, Ireland -- they were not "foreigners" in the mind of the people of Sydney. They were welcome on Charlotte Street. They were Anglo-Saxon Catholics or Protestants. They travelled the same route to work, and entered the same gate even if they had to trek two miles within the plant to get to their work site.

The gate at the bottom of Henry Street, "Hunky Town," was used by people in that

immediate area who were mostly east European. I worked at the blast furnace which is as far as you can go except for the docks at the steel plant, a two mile walk from the gate I used. I could have used another gate. When I worked in the Coke Ovens, I could have gotten off the bus at Victoria Road and walked two hundred feet and been in the Coke Ovens Department. But I stayed on the bus, I went to Henry Street's number four gate, and walked a mile over to the Coke Ovens. I felt comfortable using that gate.

The gates belonged to the community, like churches or social clubs.

The gate at the bottom of "Scab Avenue" and the gate by the side of the Subway was used by fellows who lived by the coke ovens. They used that gate because they knew each other and they knew the security people at that gate.

Working at the steel plant

My father worked in the Steel Plant until the late '30's when there were a lot of problems with union strikes. Then he went to work for the Sydney Transit Company. He was there until 1949 and then went into the drycleaning business. He is one of the two other people in my family who worked for the Steel Plant. My uncle Lewis who died a few years ago -- he worked there for 50 years, mostly in the coke ovens.

When I was fifteen years old and began working at Sydney Steel, I found another difference between Ward V and Ward VI. The personnel director who hired me in 1949 at the steel plant asked me my name, and I said Dipenta, and he said he would send me down to the other end of the steel plant "where the foreigners should be." I wanted a job, and I didn't care what he said. I was treated all right.

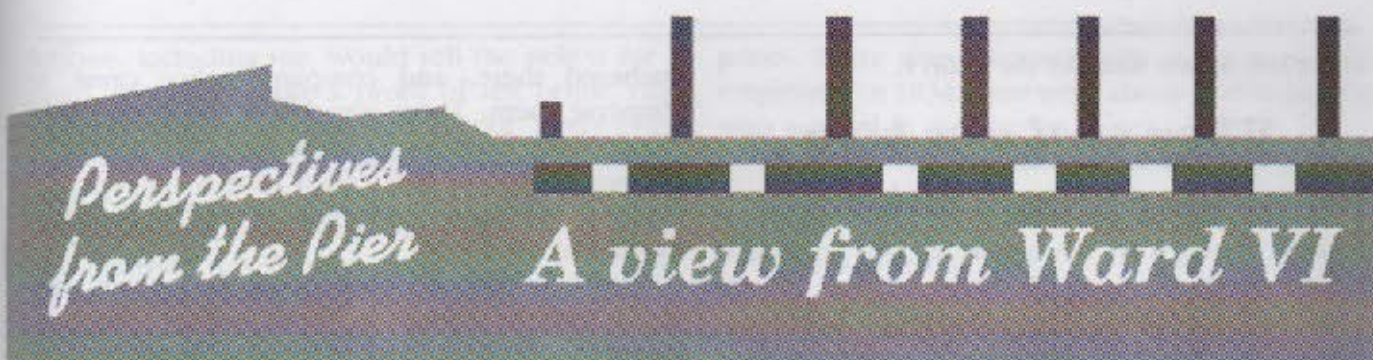
The fellows who worked in the coke ovens went to the general yard at Lingan Road. They went there to find out where they were going to work. There might be 300 men waiting at the general yard at seven o'clock in the morning, hoping for a shift that day. The foreman would say how many men were needed where, and he would call off the employment numbers of the men who were working. The men weren't professionals who specialized; they worked on anything. I worked at the blast furnace yard, the general yard, and the coke ovens yard -- whenever I could get a shift.

The blast furnace had its own yard and its own people. I was happy to get work at No. 7 Blast Furnace. Some of the happiest years of my worklife were spent there. There were good people there, willing to teach, willing to learn. They would give you hell if you did something wrong, not because they were angry, but because they cared that you did things right. These men were, and still are, good friends. They stood behind you. There were Blacks, Poles, Italians, Anglo-Saxons at No. 7. There was no name calling among us; we were like a big family. That

comradery was why Sydney Steel lasted as long as it did -- the men in all the departments helped one another, depended on each other. There were troubles to be sure, but there was brotherhood on the job.

After 1950, people didn't say they came from Ward V or Ward VI, or say what church they belonged to when they introduced themselves. They just said "I'm from the Pier, dear." They were proud of it. ■

-from an interview by Mary Anne Ducharme



Perspectives from the Pier

A view from Ward VI

by Duncan Mackay

I was named after both grandfathers Duncan Mackay and Roderick MacKillop. The families were poor; I don't think even the mice wanted to stay with us! My father got a job with Dominion Coal Company at the International Pier and stayed there until about 1950.

My father's people came to Baddeck from Scotland in 1822; they landed at North River at St. Ann's and walked from St. Ann's to Big Hill and settled there. Most of those old farms along the Baddeck River have since disappeared. He was one of many rural Protestant Scots who came here for work from Victoria County around 1900.

They saw steel and coal a great opportunity to advance themselves because farming did not provide an adequate living for most of them. Young single men came and boarded during the week and went home weekends. Some married men did this too, but there were quite a few who came with their families. They took boats, such as the *Aspy* to travel back and forth to places like Baddeck and St. Ann's, and Middle River. The children of those people, many of them have since gone to Boston and other places in the States.

My parents married in Englishtown at the Giant MacAskill place. My mother's people came from North and South Uist and Harris about 1830 and her family settled in Goose Cove at St. Ann's. They belonged to the Kirk. Many of the people of the Kirk stayed in St. Ann's rather than emigrate with Norman MacLeod to Australia and New Zealand.

Both my parents were Gaelic speakers and

I heard Gaelic at home and with relatives. My grandfather read the Bible in Gaelic, but not many could read or write Gaelic. Besides this, the language at work was English and the children were taught in English. All this contributed to the assimilation into English. Up to a few years ago, we had a Gaelic service once a year. Now there are only one or two fluent speakers that I know of. I was part of that generation that lost the Gaelic. The same thing happened to other ethnic languages at the Pier too.

The Trinity Church

Some Presbyterians joined the United Church in 1925, as you know, and some remained independent. I was raised in the United Church. The Trinity United Church, here on the corner of Victoria Road and Matilda Street served the union of three distinctive congregations. There was St. James Presbyterian Church which comprised the union of St. James and St. Mark's in 1919, and the Victoria (Methodist) United Church in 1937. That is why the church was named "Trinity." The union was a success. The joining of Scottish Presbyterians, mostly from Victoria County, with the Methodists whose roots for the most part were in Newfoundland, made a congregation infused and strengthened by the heritages of both. Almost fifty years afterwards, a "new" congregation has emerged, a blending of the parent groups.

Trinity has produced twelve men who have become ministers of the United Church; it has demonstrated generosity to mission and service funds; and it presently has approximately 300 families with 550 individual members. But the future will be a challenge because of an aging congregation with smaller families, and many young people leaving the area. This will materially

affect the future work of the church.

When coal was king

In 1899, there were only 5,000 people in Sydney. In ten years there were 20,000 because of steel and coal. About 15 distinct ethnic groups came to the area and they were bound to clash at first. The Women's Missionary Society worked among "the foreigners" -- a term we don't use anymore -- to teach them to assimilate, to adopt the Canadian way of life.

One time somebody referred to Whitney Pier as "the Chicago of the Maritimes," because there was a murder at the Coke Ovens. This was not a common thing to happen, it was unusual. But it was played up in the newspapers, and the Pier began to get a reputation.

Ward V and VI developed somewhat differently because of relative proximity to the Steel Plant. Many Scots and English families had been in Canada for generations before the coal and steel era, and those who settled in this area lived on tracts of farmland. Some of these sold land to the coal and steel interests. This set up the patterns of settlement later, with the new immigrants tending to live close to work on the property of the Steel Plant, or in boarding houses, and more of the Anglo-Celtic people living in their own homes on their own property. Later, when the new immigrants became self-sufficient, they moved away from the Steel Plant area, and built homes elsewhere. The common denominator in both wards Dominion Coal and Sydney Steel. Service businesses like stores, laundries, and others depended on the economic base of coal too.

My father was a coal shipper and belonged to the United Mine Workers. When the union went on strike in 1923 and 1925, there was no government relief. Instead the UMW gave the workers relief payments from its funds. My father received less than \$2.00 a week to take care of himself and his family. Feelings were high and the wages were low in those times. The strike was bitter and in the end, the miners were forced back to work for less than they started with before the strike. The government put its power behind the company instead of the workers.

During one strike a man by the name of Davis was killed at Waterford Lake, the place where power was generated for the mines. Miners

gathered there, and company police came to disperse them. There was blame on both sides. Shots were fired, and Davis was killed. Miner's Memorial Day, as it is called now is on June 11, and it is celebrated every year. It used to be called Davis Day.

One time the coal miners had a sympathy strike with the workers at the Steel Plant. The steel company settled and went back to work, but the miners stayed on strike. Those were the days of Jim McLachlan who got arrested and jailed for telling the truth: that one law served the rich, and another was good enough for the poor.

All this happened when I was a boy, so I didn't understand then how serious all this was, or much of what it was all about. I remember seeing uniformed soldiers on horseback when I was a kid-- I thought it was exciting, great.

Getting around the Pier and to school

I went to Whitney School at age 6 in 1920. No roads were ploughed in winter, and there were few cars and no buses, so getting to school was sometimes a challenge for the youngest students. I remember being glad if there were car tracks because it was easier than walking in deep snow.

The students at my school were mostly Scot and English but there were also Newfoundlanders and Jewish people. Nearly everyone was Protestant in this "public school" because the Catholics went to their own private schools.

I never felt anything against Catholics even though I went to a Protestant School -- we all played sports together. There were differences of course. For instance, the Catholics went skating and played ball on Sundays, which the Protestants would not generally do. But I never personally saw any strong clashes of religion.

In 1927, I remember taking the Cape Breton Electric Company tram line to school. It went all over city and you could buy ten tickets for 40 cents. The C.P.E. tram came down Victoria Road, made a turn at Dominion Street, and went right down to the bottom at the coal piers. And then you changed the trolley and came back up the hill to town. That was good to get you over and back from school for a week. But a number of the

fellows, including me, would sell the tickets for 5 cents each and make a profit of ten cents. That took the pain out of walking to school. That's when I learned to smoke, because a deck of cigarettes cost 10 cents. In church they told us that cigarettes would stunt your growth, but I was always short and figured I was stunted anyway.

There were two ferries carrying people across the harbour, *The Electronic* and *The Peerless*. *The Electronic* called at Westmount, Point Edward, and North Sydney. We would get off *The Electronic* at North Sydney, transfer to a street car in North Sydney, and this took us down to Sydney Mines. Sometimes in the winter, when the harbour froze, I remember walking over the ice, following markers of spruce trees.

I finished high school at the Sydney Academy in 1931. I would have liked to go to college, but we couldn't afford it. This was the time of the Depression, and I spent three years after school without a job. I tried not to waste my time, and I took part in sports at the Community House, but I hated hanging around.

Coal boom & coal bust

Finally, I got a job checking coal at the International Pier in 1934, with a wage of \$3.40 a day, \$20.40 a week. I thought I had all the money in the world. All they asked me when I applied was whether I could write my name. I worked with that company -- through all the changes, for 46 years.

As a checker, it was my responsibility to have an accounting of all coal shipped from the Pier, and to get the number and weight of every car that goes into a particular ship. A specific grade of coal went to a specific hold of the ship. A collier has five or six holds and one order from Montreal might be for two holds of screen coal and three of slack or domestic coal.

Dominion Coal had customers all over the Maritimes and that first summer I worked, we also shipped over 3 million tons of coal to Montreal, to a place called Windmill Point. Montreal was heated almost exclusively by coal and the government subsidized the huge shipping costs. One time we had 17 collier ships hauling from Sydney Harbour to Montreal. International Pier employed three shifts of shippers, trimmers, office staff, checkers, repairmen, engine crews, tow boat crew, linesmen,

pilots. There were between 375 and 400 people employed. In 1934 there were about 13,000 people who worked in the various mines.

There was no other available power as easy to get as coal and the demand seemed to grow and grow.

I worked as a checker for four years and then in 1938, I was transferred to the Dominion Shipping Company under John R. MacIsaac who was the traffic and transportation manager. He had to look after convoy ships in Sydney Harbour. Part of our responsibility was to see that a ship that reported to Dominion Shipping had enough crew, bunker coal, ship stores and victuals to reach its overseas destination. The convoys were slow, their speed usually between four and ten knots, so an overseas voyage might take a month.

Our work was classed as "essential" by the British Ministry of War Transport because we were involved in serving convoy ships in Sydney Harbour. At one time there were over 140 ships waiting to be escorted into the harbour which was referred to as "Eastern Canadian Port." The name was purposely vague for security purposes. I remember convoys during the war that would return after two days at sea because of enemy submarines. Five ships were lost to subs in Conception Bay.

Coal was king, but it did not last after the war ended. When C.D. Howe became a Liberal Cabinet Minister under King, one of the controversial things he did in the 1950's was to give government aid to a private company to extend the gas pipe-line from Winnipeg to Montreal. Suddenly gas was cheaper than coal.

Time to settle down and build a house

I was steady fellow, thinking about getting married to Margaret MacKenzie, who is now my wife. I had my ideals. I thought a fellow could get on in life if he made up his mind to it.

Margaret's uncle was Dr. D. M. Sinclair, a Gaelic scholar, who came to Trinity Church in 1937. Her great, great grandfather was the Tíre Bard John MacLean. He wrote the song called *The Gloomy Forest, A' choille gbruamach*, a reflection of how tough he found it to get along farming in Nova Scotia. The poem was circulated widely in

Scotland, and was instrumental in stopping immigration from Scotland to Nova Scotia for about 25 years.

I thought it was time to settle down, but I had no money. Whitney Credit Union came into being in 1934 but about all you could borrow then was about 10 dollars if you were a member. After a number of setbacks, I was able to buy the lot on which I live now, which is 50' x 100' with curb and gutter put in. It cost me \$113.00.

The Co-op Housing Movement began in the early thirties, during the Depression. There were many people out of work, and there was little welfare or social assistance. Holy Redeemer parish expressed a particular interest in it and started kitchen groups and programs. At the Pier, there had been cooperative gardening and so the co-operative idea was familiar here. Out in Reserve, Tompkinsville was the first housing cooperative group in Nova Scotia. Others followed, like the second one here on Matilda Street called Princeville. They were practical homes, not fancy, but nice. I was interested because I could provide "sweat equity" even if I did not have the cash to buy the material. The government loaned the money. The formal organization, though was for 12 houses and 12 builders and they already had their quota, and I couldn't get in on Co-operative housing at the time.

The National Housing Act came into being in 1938. The Federal government would advance mortgages to people who wanted to build. I went to see them and they turned me down because I wanted to build at the Pier. They said that the value of the land was not sufficient to warrant a loan.

So I had to do it on my own, and I didn't think I had much of a chance. At the time I

borrowed, I had never been in a bank before. But when I talked to the manager of the Bank of Montreal, he just asked me if I was working and if I had borrowed before. For some reason, he agreed to give me the loan I needed. I paid it back in 12 years at \$14.56 a month.

My house was finished on New Year's day in 1940. Complete, it cost about \$1,400. All the wiring of the house, including all the lighting fixtures, which we still have -- cost less than \$100. We got by and were happy. We raised six children and now we have twenty grandchildren.

One of my sons is a teacher at Whitney Pier Junior High, and another works at the Steel Plant. My other children have moved to various parts of Canada. I still use coal for heating my house, and others do too, but coal is no longer king.

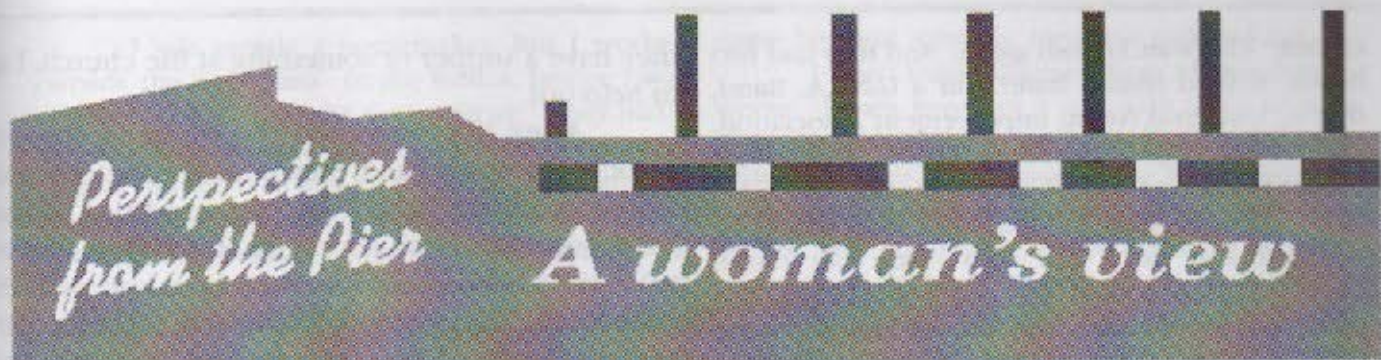
Changes for the Pier

I think that the cultural blending that I have seen in Wards V and VI in Whitney Pier is something that is happening all over the world. It will continue because of intermarriage across cultures and religions. We will get to be more like each other and this is a natural process and not regrettable.

The Pier is losing population, but the city of Sydney is going through the same process. The average family is smaller than before, and families are gravitating to surrounding areas of the County where they have room to build their houses.

Whitney Pier is a good place to live, and people that have been here for generations have a spirit of belonging and they want to stay. The Pier is a well knit, quiet, industrious, and safe place. ■

- interview by Mary Anne Ducharme



Perspectives from the Pier

A woman's view

by Beryl Braithwaite

I am one of the oldest Black women of the West Indian families living in Whitney Pier. There are only a few West Indian families left in Whitney Pier of the original three hundred or so families who lived here at one time. I have been a Black person first, and then I was from the Pier.

I was born the second of nine children and we grew up on Tupper Street in the "coke ovens," they used to call it, but it is Whitney Pier.

Coming from Barbados

Coming from Barbados to Sydney was a big change. A lot of them who came couldn't stand the weather and a lot of them died of T.B., pneumonia, and pleurisy. Quite a few went back to Barbados.

My father came from Barbados in 1906. And my mother came later in 1917. They weren't married when my father first came. He went back to Barbados three times and on the third time, she finally made up her mind to come here with him. In order for the women to come into Canada, they had to have a letter saying they were going to get married as soon as they arrived.

At the time they had sent some men from Sydney Steel to Barbados to look for men to come over here to work, and my father heard about it. But he didn't come over with the first lot of men who came. The other men had to pay back their passage to the steel plant. But my father came on his own, the steel company didn't pay his way. He had money before he left Barbados.

When my father first came here, he worked

at the coke ovens. The wages were very low. At first he was making twelve cents an hour, and after two years he was getting fourteen cents an hour. That's a big difference in the pay they're getting today. Another difference was, in Barbados, the class system was very well defined; here everyone mixed together. In the Pier, it seemed like everyone was so closely knit and we had so many different nationalities between Tupper, Laurier, Hankard, Lingan Road and Curry's Land. There were Italians, there were Negroes, there were Hungarians, there were Polish, Ukrainians, French, Indians, Jews. And they all seemed to get along very well together. Most of the West Indians were from Barbados, but some came from Guyana, Trinidad, and Grenada. We knew where they came from by their accents. The Black people in the Pier were always called "coloured," but in the 1960's, with the happenings in the United States, they began to be called "Black."

Blending the old & the new

My father really came here as a shoemaker. He worked for the steel plant for so long and then he went into business on his own. He bought a big building on Tupper Street with five bedrooms. Then he opened a shoemaker shop. Then we had a grocery store on Tupper Street in the same building and then we had another store across the street which was a confectionary. And then another building with four apartments. He always said, if anything happened to him, at least we'd have an income coming in.

The people from Barbados and the other West Indian areas used to play an awful lot of

cricket. That's an English game. And they had two bands, a West Indian Band and a U.N.I.A. Band, that is, Universal Negro Improvement Association. The bands played marching music, some West Indian music and lots of church music.

For the West Indians, their food would be "chicken and rice," and they made hot sauce. There was a dish called "coo coo" made out of corn meal with gravy on it. The Italians have the same thing, only they call it "polanta." They made West Indian bread and the West Indian turnovers and West Indian fruitcake. Most of the West Indians at the time, the Hungarians and the Polish and the Ukrainians all had their special food. But the young people today don't bother too much with ethnic foods.

My mother would get her supplies for making West Indian foods by mail from relatives in Barbados. There were different rices, sweet potatoes, yams, and pigeon peas. But then the Canadian government put a ban on mailing these foods. So then Simon David's grocery store used to bring them in from Montreal. Now if we can't get exactly the right thing, there are things we can substitute, but we can get almost everything from Halifax these days.

Going to Church

We were Church of England. We had a coloured minister here named Reverend England. But he left and went to the United States. Then afterwards we had the African Orthodox Church. Most of all, the coloured people went to the African Orthodox Church. The coloured people used to go the churches down the Pier, and remarks were passed that they didn't want Blacks in their church, so they had to find some place of their own. That is how the African Orthodox Church started.

The church was built by the congregation. At that time we didn't have too much. The bell came from Sydney Steel, from one of the engines. We still have that bell in the church. We have a beautiful church now. I was very active in the church, especially with singing. We used to have Mass at seven in the morning, then again at eleven, then I'd go back and I'd teach Sunday School at two, then there were night services. I spent nearly all of my whole Sunday in church. Even now, if

they have a supper or something at the church, I go to help out.

After the Universal Negro Improvement Association was started, they built the Menelik Hall. Dr. Calder and my father, Alec Parris, and Mr. Cadogan and Lawyer Hamilton got together and they said we will build a hall of our own. They were leaders in the community. They figured if they got together with enough people of their own, they could build a hall. And they did. In 1936, they built Menelik Hall. It was named after an African king in Ethiopia. After the war started and the Italians invaded Ethiopia, we were sending money over to Ethiopia to help the Africans.

The Black Cross Nurses

When we had the West Indian Band and the U.N.I.A. in the early thirties, we had a group of women called the "Black Cross Nurses." It was like a private club. They used to wear uniforms. They had black on their hats and a white cross on their capes. They would go to homes where anybody had babies or small children. They'd help different mothers with the children. They'd go shopping for them and teach the mothers to do different things. Sort of help them to get used to the idea of living in Cape Breton. A lot of the mothers came from Barbados young and they didn't understand about dressings and things like that. They really looked after each other. They did that for years. The Black Cross Nurses were mainly married, but there might have been some single women. Most of the women came married, but some might have come as domestics.

I was only nine or ten at the time, but I remember a Mrs. Gibson was a member of the Nurses.

I was mostly a Homemaker

I met my husband at a dance at the Menelik Hall. He came from Donkin. He used to come in every weekend and we'd go to the show or things like that. There were about six Black families living in Donkin at the time. His father had been killed working as a coal miner. We got engaged at Christmas and then in January, he went overseas and I never saw him for five years. We got married when he came back. That was forty-seven years ago.

I was mostly a homemaker, but I worked outside the home too. In the forties, before I was married, I worked at the Co-op Store. They had a coloured Co-Op store on the corner of William and Tupper Street. It was owned and operated by Black people. But the pay wasn't that good, so I just figured to go look to greener pastures in Toronto. My sister was living there. But I just stayed for a year. I didn't like it. I thought they were very "cold" people up there. Also, I couldn't take the cold weather.

Once when my husband was laid off, I took a job at Woolworth's. I was the only Black person working there. I never had any trouble with anybody -- well, just one lady, but I wouldn't repeat what she said. But I told her off, so that was the end of that. I was Woolworth's for twenty-three years.

Living is very good at the Pier

One time, when we lived on Tupper Street, everybody had cows and chickens in the back yard. But then there was a City Ordinance that this was within city limits, so you had to get rid of all the cows and chickens and pigs.

So that was how they cleared out those old shacks and houses and big buildings that were down there. On Tupper and Laurier and Hankard Streets, they're all new buildings. The new Co-op buildings are built on Tupper Street, that's where I used to live. It gives the place a different atmosphere, much cleaner, much nicer. Living conditions today are very good.

But a lot of the West Indian people have died or moved away. There are a lot of new people living there now. They're from all over the place. There were quite a few who moved to Toronto and they moved back to Sydney. I don't know too many of the young people around today.

We had a big reunion here in 1985, and they had three cars -- a train came down with three cars and they were just packed with all of the former Sydney people -- our boys and girls. They all came home the reunion which lasted for almost two weeks.

Every year, there is a West Indian Festival in the church yard. It's a good chance for everyone to get together. And people outside the community

come because they like the West Indian food.

I don't think Whitney Pier's changed to the worse. Down here, it's a very safe place to walk. I've seen me leaving at twelve o'clock in the night, walk from here right down to the Pier Legion and back. Nobody bothers you on the streets. You can go out and leave your doors open, front doors, back doors. Nobody bothers you down here.

People say, in Toronto or Montreal, you could be living next to some person for years, and they'll come out every morning and they'll pass you and don't speak. But down here, they will speak to you. My family is very close knit: my son lives up the street from me, my other son lives over there on Tupper Street. My sister lives up the other end of Laurier Street, and my other sister lives next door to her. My brother lives over on Hankard Street. It's very important to stay close.

And a lot of the younger people are very good. Like if they know there's any senior citizens around, they will go and shovel their paths for them. We have a senior citizens' place on the corner of William and Laurier Street, and the young boys and girls, if they see an old person going up the road, they'll come and take them by the arm. They take them where they have to go. Quite a few times when I'm out shopping, I'll see young people, and I'll pick them up and bring them home or take them wherever they want to go.

I started writing a history

I started writing a history of the community. I thought it would be nice if your younger generation would be able to find out about their ancestors and their families that came from the West Indies and what they did. I have a good memory. I can remember from the time I was five years old, even the first day I went to school. I can go down Tupper Street and tell you every store on Tupper, Laurier, William and Hankard, just where they were, who owned them, and what they did. One time, we had dry cleaners, we had tailors, we had jewellers, we had bakery shops and restaurants, clothing stores, food stores. Anything you wanted, you could buy in this area without going to "overtown." That's changed. Right now we don't have anything like that, and the young boys and girls have to go away to find jobs.

If the boys want to find jobs, it has to be at

the steel plant. Living so close to the coke ovens, with all the pollution, well, in those days, nobody thought about getting sick or cancer or anything like that. But there's nothing over there now. Everything is torn down. In a way, I was glad to see it close; in another way, I didn't want to see it closed because that put an awful lot of people out of work and work is scarce. Those men would either have to go on pension or look for a job somewhere else.

I like being one of the oldest Black women in Whitney Pier -- I don't mind that. But it feels good that I'm this active and I can get around. Just last month I had a great granddaughter. I thank the Lord that I lived this long to be able to help other people. We always helped one another at the Pier.■

- interview by Diane Chisholm, Beaton Institute

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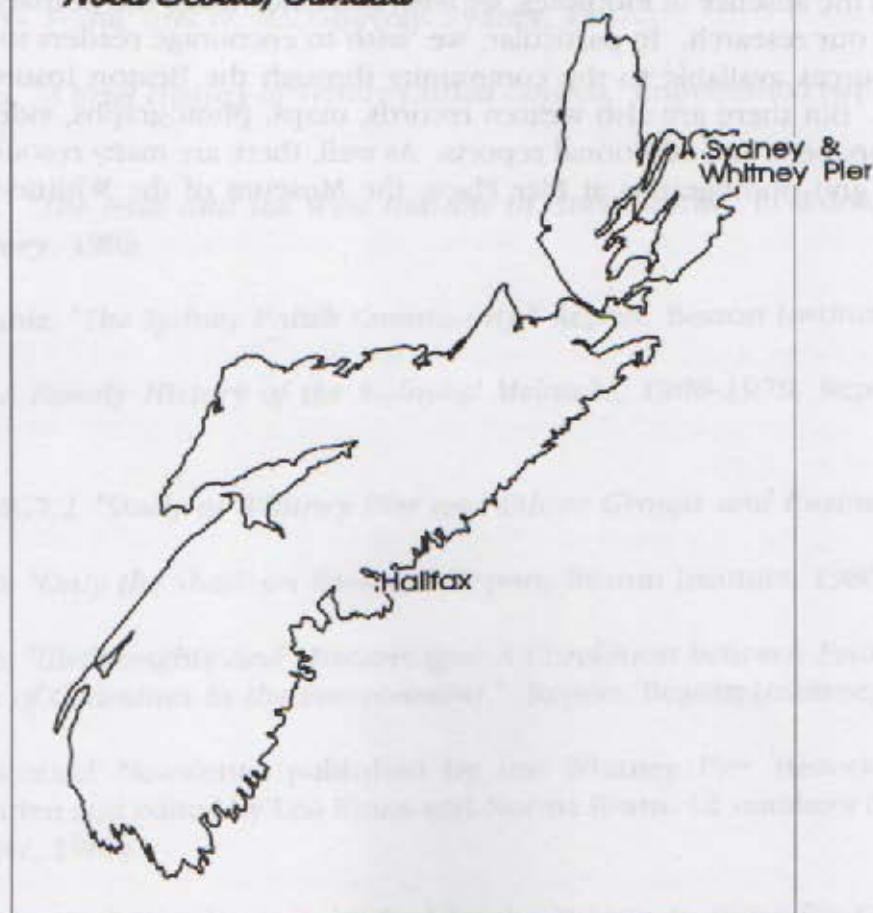
The Steel Project, Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton, (Coordinator, Elizabeth Beaton). The Steel Project is a comprehensive on-going archival and research project which documents historical and contemporary steel making in Cape Breton. Its materials consist of artifacts, photographs, videography and film, taped oral history and written records.

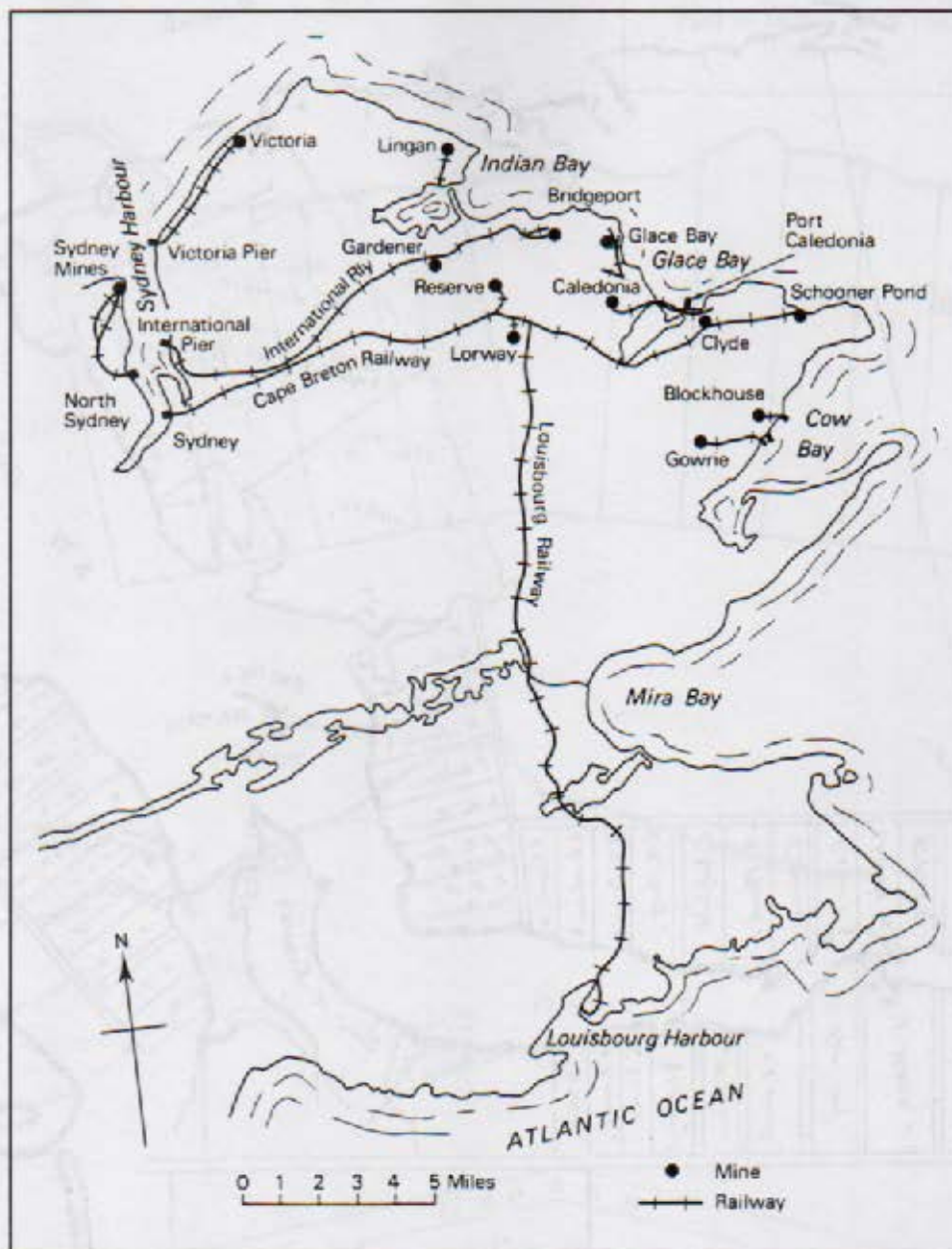
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★ Note: In the absence of footnotes, we wish to acknowledge the primary and secondary sources for our research. In particular, we wish to encourage readers to take advantage of the resources available to the community through the Beaton Institute, a sampling given here. But there are also written records, maps, photographs, videos, oral history tapes, newspapers, and additional reports. As well, there are many resources in the form of artifacts and photographs at Pier Place, the Museum of the Whitney Pier Historical Society.

Map Appendix

Nova Scotia, Canada



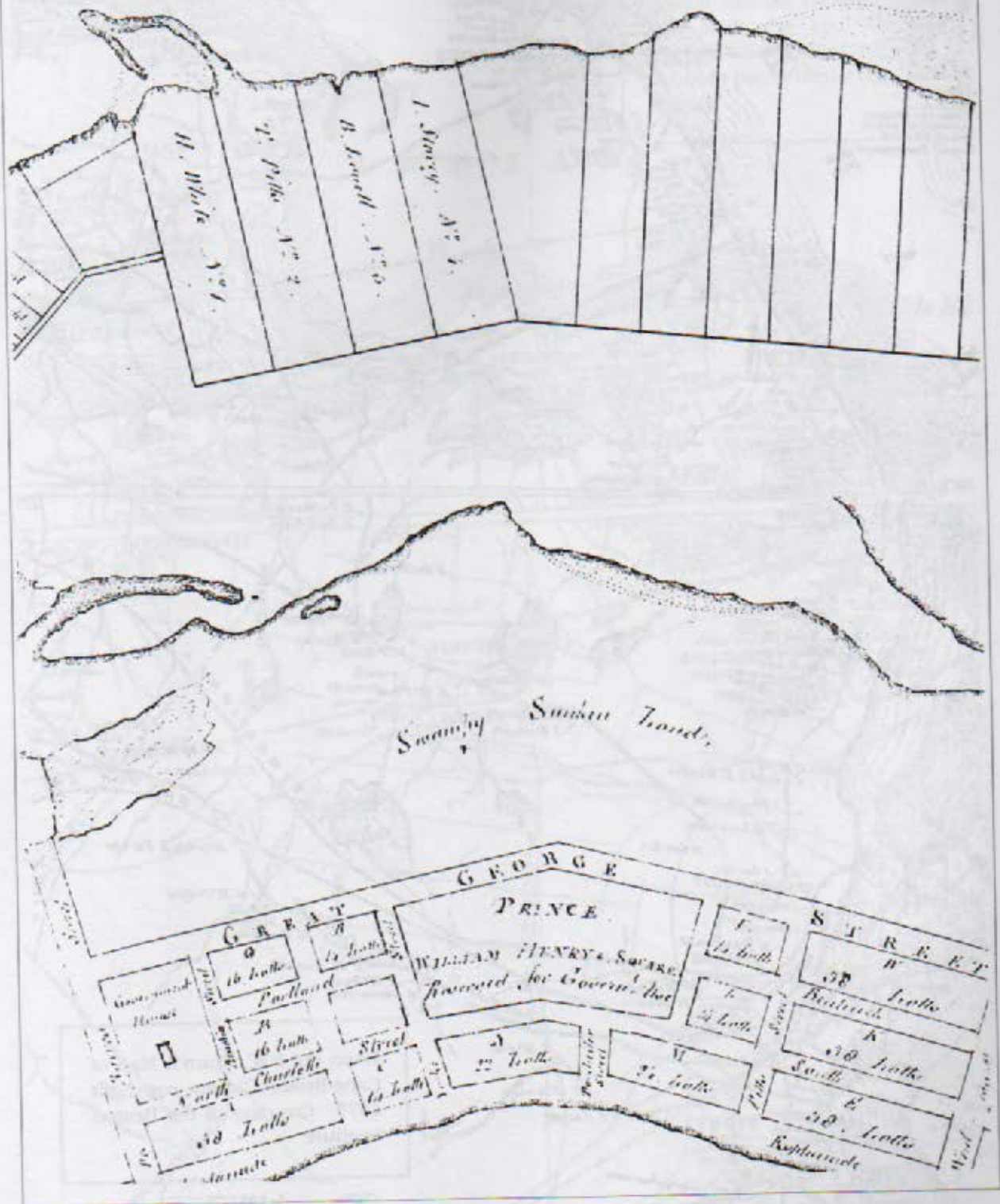


From Hornby, *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1992), p. 175. Source: A.F. Church, *Topographical Township Map of Cape Breton County, Nova Scotia*, (Bedford, NS: A.F. Church & Co. 1877).

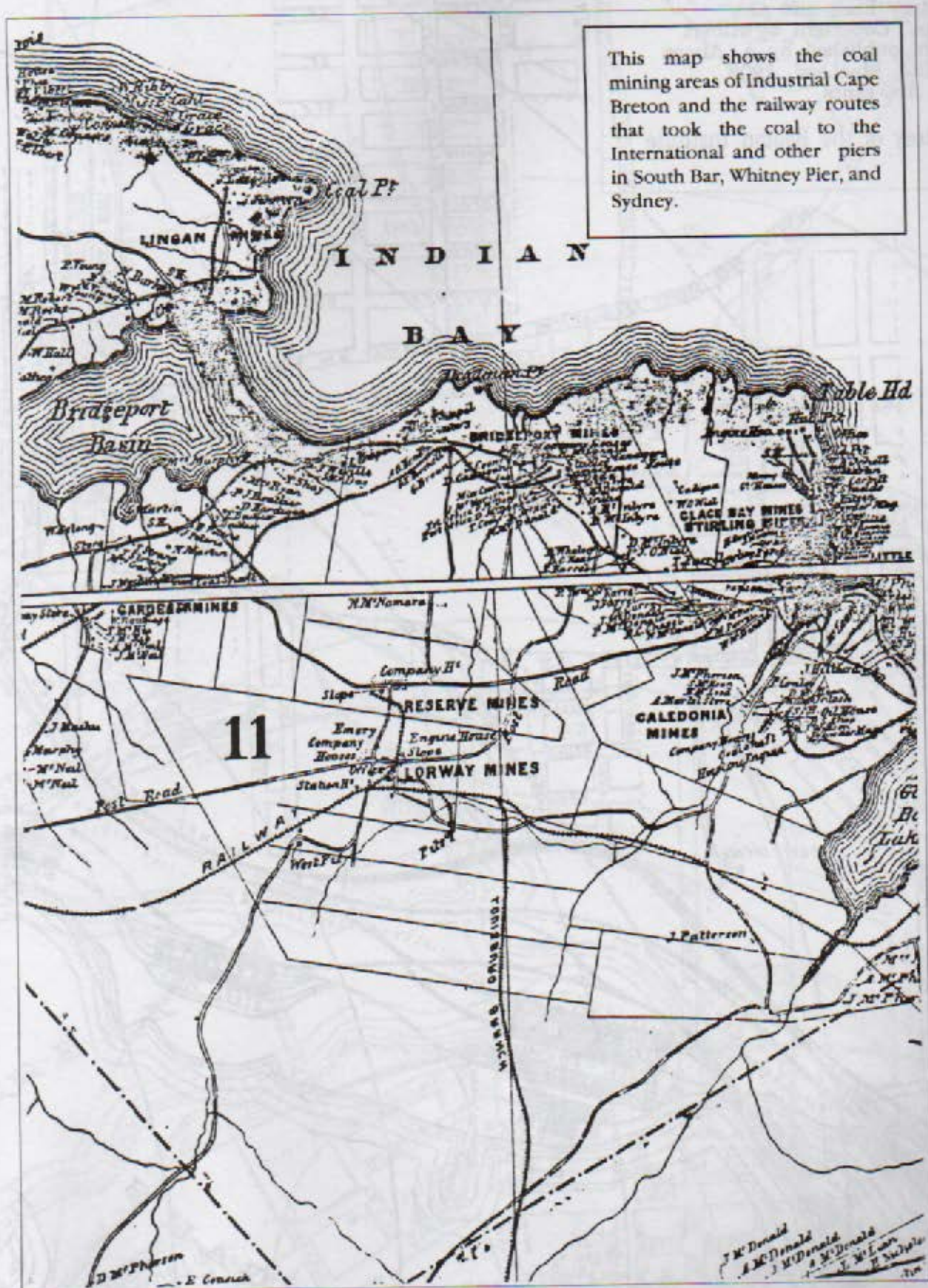
These colliery railways were the coal transportation routes from Cape Breton County coal mines which led to the International Piers in what was later to become Whitney Pier.

SYDNEY RIVER

Courtesy of the Beaton Institute
Plan of Sydney River (ca. 1795)



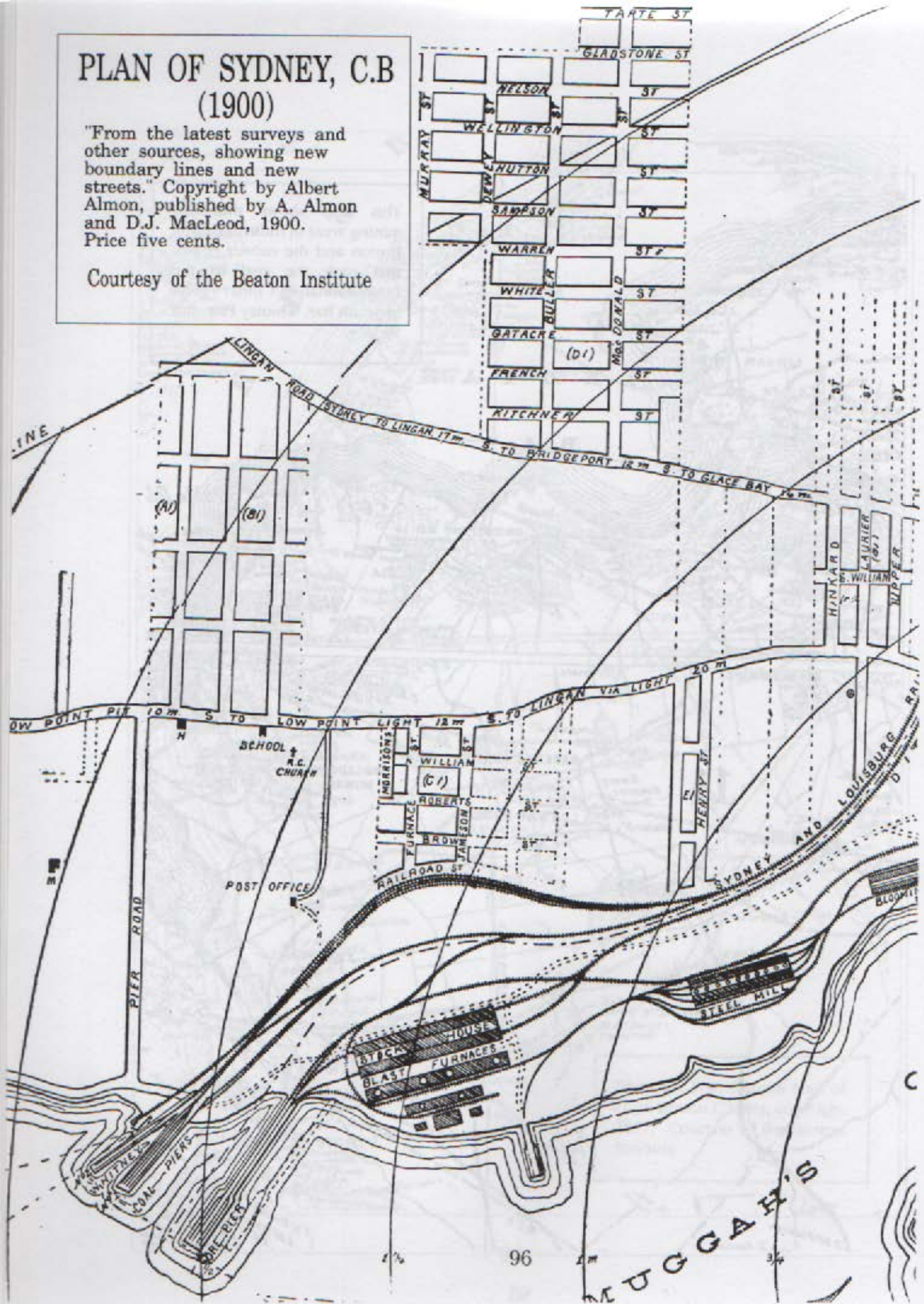


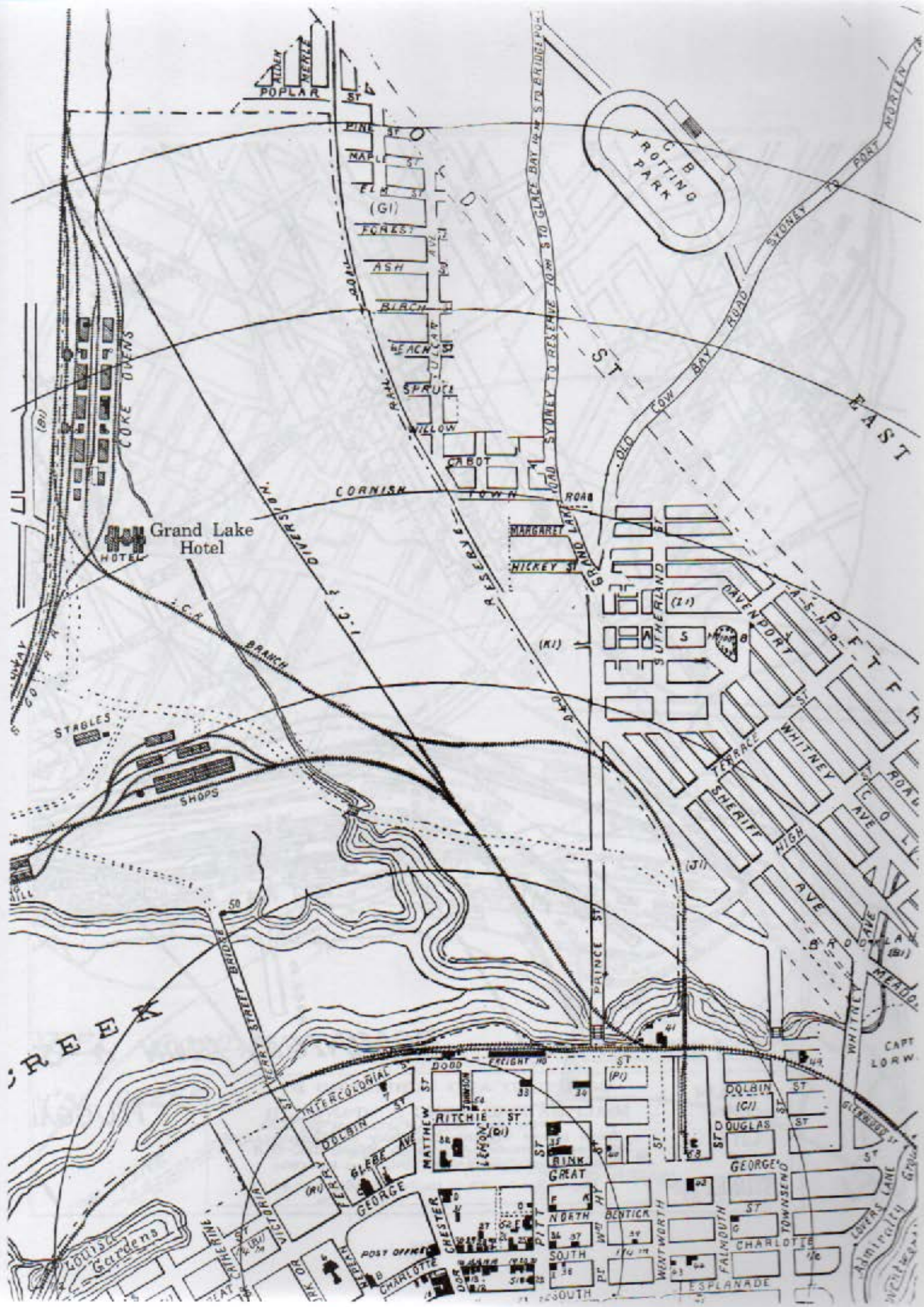


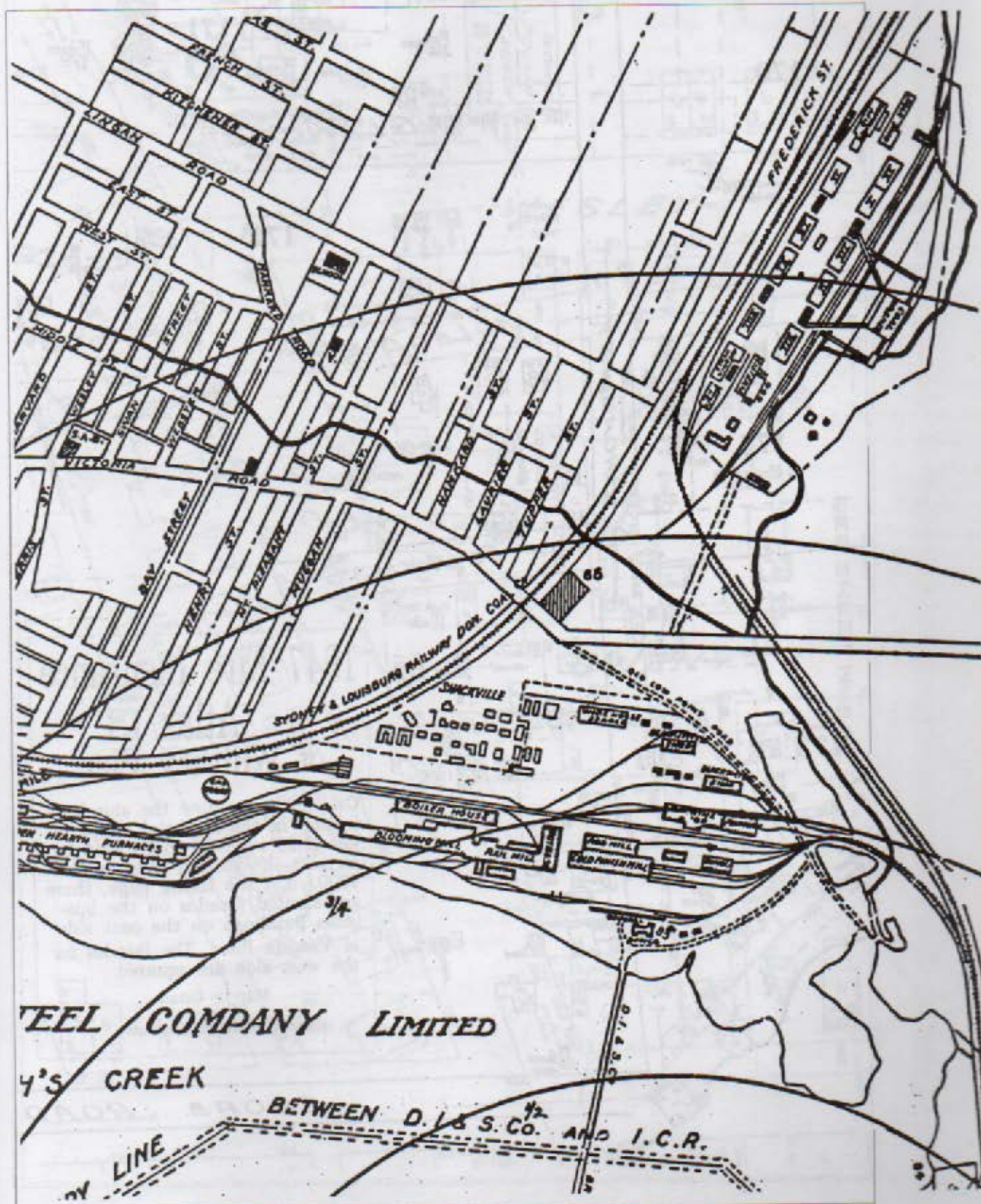
PLAN OF SYDNEY, C.B. (1900)

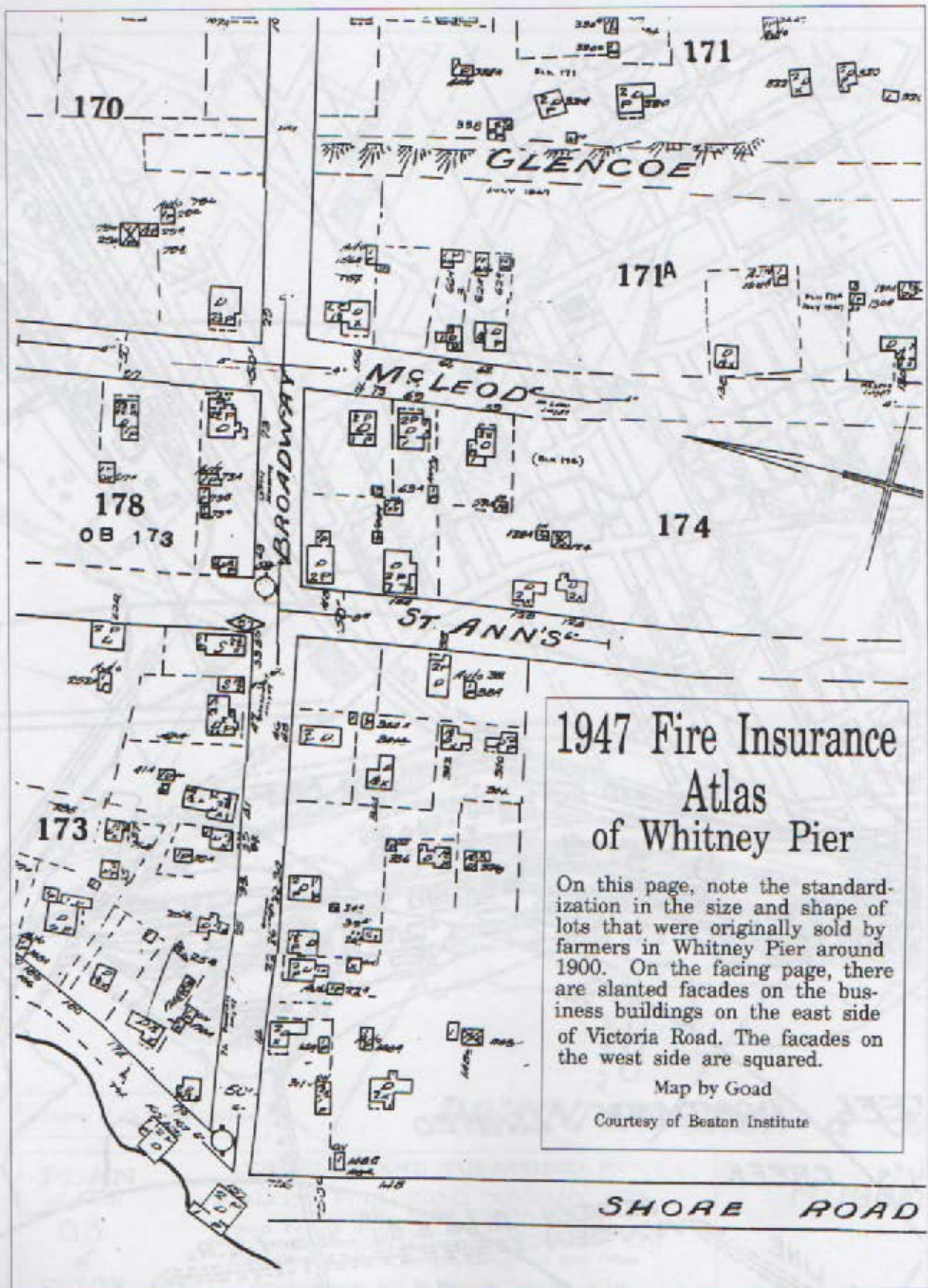
"From the latest surveys and other sources, showing new boundary lines and new streets." Copyright by Albert Almon, published by A. Almon and D.J. MacLeod, 1900. Price five cents.

Courtesy of the Beaton Institute

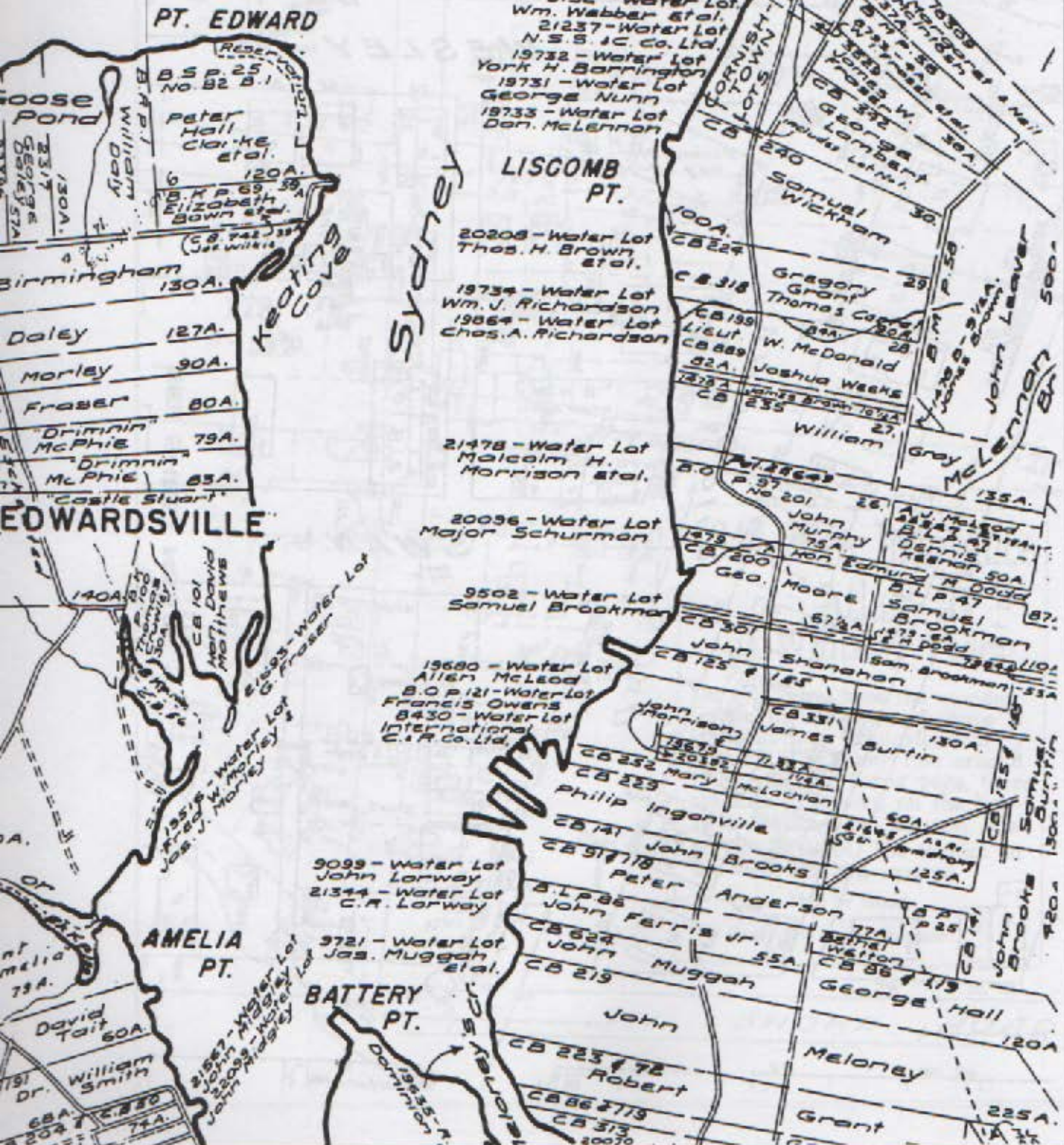


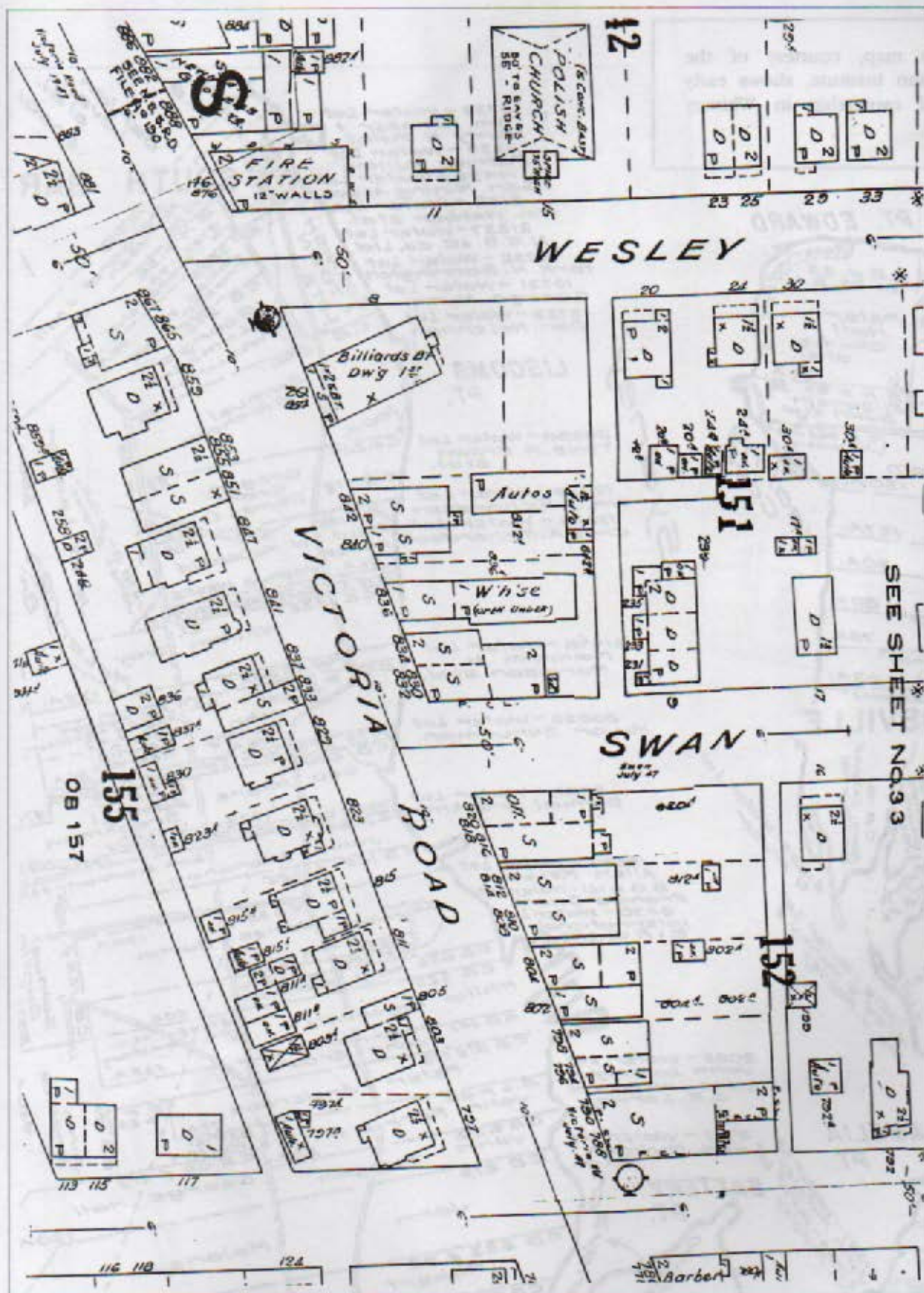






This map, courtesy of the Beaton Institute, shows early land ownership in Whitney Pier.







From the Pier, Dear! is a history, a series of well-researched essays based on the study of many people who find Whitney Pier in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia a fascinating place. But this is not just a book for academics: it is written in an informal style with short segments which are enjoyable to read for students and arm-chair historians. It is beautifully illustrated with artwork as well as nearly 150 photographs. The story has many themes: coal and steel, boom and bust, the coming together of people from all over the world, ethnic struggle and blending -- all of this the work of forming a distinctly Canadian industrial community.

In a broad sense, this story could be told about other places, but Cape Breton Island is like no where else in Canada, and the workers here made a unique mark in the history of the Canadian labour movement.

Whitney Pier is a place facing the challenges of the present, but it is also a place of echoes from the past -- the names of streets and businesses, the churches, the faces of the new generation reflecting the richness of ethnic diversity.

In this book, we find perspectives as well as fact, the personal stories of three individuals who were there when the history was unfolding, and who remain passionate about the place that above all others they are proud to call home.

This is a book to cherish for anyone with roots in industrial Cape Breton, past or present.